

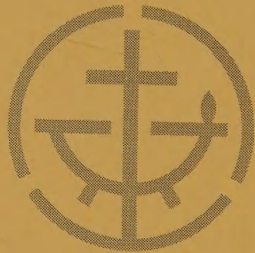
A NEW INVASION
OF BELGIUM

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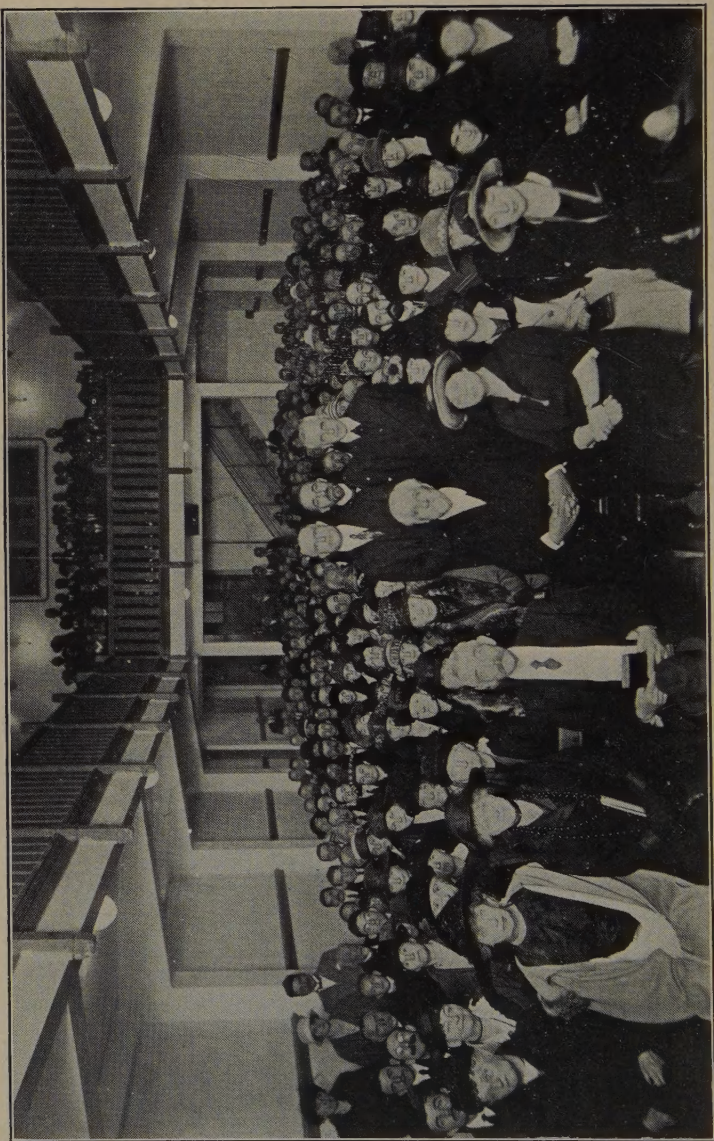
PHILIP E. HOWARD



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AN EVANGELISTIC SERVICE IN THE ASSEMBLY HALL OF THE MISSION IN BRUSSELS

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A NEW INVASION
OF BELGIUM

By

PHILIP E. HOWARD, 1870-

PHILADELPHIA

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL TIMES COMPANY

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO MY GRANDSON
PHILIP GILLINGHAM HOWARD
THIS BOOK IS LOVINGLY
DEDICATED

PREFACE

“But why Belgium? And why another invasion?”

Belgium, because of the ascertained spiritual needs of that land; and this time, over the fields and through city, town, and village a new invasion, not by a gray flood of enemy myriads, but by a little company of faith-filled soldiers of the Cross.

So urgent, and rightly insistent, has been the call to the Western Churches to reach the Orient and the other regions beyond with the Gospel, that far too little has been known, particularly in America, concerning present religious conditions on the continent of Europe.

The glowing and glorious history of the Reformation is too easily substituted in the American mind for any study of the facts as they are in the Europe of today. In the reports of the Alliance of Reformed Churches on the European Churches, one finds in the last few years ample material for a fresh arousement of evangelical believers who live in favored and comparatively peaceful lands. But these and other similar reports are seen by few persons, and there is a look of polite bewilderment on the face of almost any American church member when one ventures to speak of the spiritual darkness in a country like Belgium, and the need of evangelistic work even “in Flanders field.”

But the darkness and need are there. The light, too, is there, and is growing brighter. And the way

in which a new invasion, this time an invasion of light and life, has come upon Belgium constitutes one of the most significant missionary experiences of this generation.

God works through human instruments with such providing care and loving guidance that this story of the Belgian Gospel Mission is necessarily biographical. The composite narrative of the work as it exists today is the result of a knowledge of the enterprise from the beginning; of observations made in the Mission stations; and of prolonged interviews with Belgians themselves, representing many sides of the national life,—humble miners and peasants, soldiers, business men, teachers, ministers, colporteurs, high government officials, and brave women who could tell you what war means,—and what Christ now means to them.

Nearly all of these chapters in whole or in part have appeared in *The Sunday School Times*, and extended quotations are made from that which Mr. and Mrs. Ralph C. Norton have written about the work. Since the story is one of experience and observation, no attempt is made by the author in this simple record of God's dealings with his servants, to offer on his part anything other than a personal testimony in terms that are intended first to unfold the marvelous way in which God has called, and equipped, and guided the founders of the Mission, and their consecrated associates, and then to disclose something of the blessed results of the

work, with a glimpse of the far reaching opportunities awaiting the workers.

A word about the founders. Ralph Norton was born near Jonesboro, Indiana. When he was about nineteen years of age he came under conviction of sin through the preaching of a Quaker evangelist, and, asking another boy to go forward with him, he accepted Christ as his Saviour. Later, when the Methodists began a series of meetings, Ralph and a friend of his visited from house to house, praying with those whom they interviewed. He well remembers that one woman who slammed the door in their faces came to the altar that very night.

Ralph's chief interest up to that time was in making money. But now other purposes became dominant. He wanted an education; and almost at once after his conversion he felt called to the ministry. It was in May, 1888, that he was converted. In 1889 he went to De Pauw—a Belgian name, by the way,—and began his preparatory school work, in which he spent three years, followed by four years in the college, always working his way through. He graduated in 1896. He was especially adept in salesmanship, and he had groups of men under his direction, canvassing for educational supplies and books in the South.

After about three years of this type of work young Norton believed that the Lord plainly put this question to him, "Which do you think I need more, men or money?" He could not escape that searching question. At about this time he was

called to speak in an Epworth League meeting, and his experience in that meeting, and later, led him to resign and to go to the Moody Institute in Chicago.

It was at Moody that he met Edith Fox, who was there as a student. Her grandparents had been charter members of the Methodist Church in Manchester, Iowa. Her father, Henry C. Fox, was a teacher and business man. Upon his death, her mother was left with two children. Edith never knew just when she was converted. No crisis experience of conversion came into her life, but she was a Christian by training and by conviction. After her High School course, she went to Oberlin for a year to study music. She had been much interested in music from childhood, and was a church organist when she was only fourteen. In Oberlin, however, she lapsed into worldliness. It was when Charles M. Alexander, the Gospel song leader, and M. B. Williams, the evangelist, came to her home town of Manchester, to which she had returned, that she became deeply impressed spiritually, in their meetings, and Mr. Alexander asked her to play the piano in the meetings at Clarinda, Iowa, and again at Tarkio in the Autumn of 1900.

Mrs. Norton says that it was largely due to Mr. Alexander's influence that she came back from the worldliness into which she had drifted. Mr. Alexander urged her to give up her concert accompanying, and this she finally did, entering Moody Institute that same Autumn, where she remained until January, 1902.

Ralph Norton and Edith Fox, thus meeting in the training school to which God had so clearly led them, were married April 16th, 1902. Mr. Norton had been earning an income of several thousand dollars a year when he left the book concern with which he had been connected. How great was the change in his circumstances under his new conviction of duty may be seen from the fact that these two young people had fifty dollars when they started out in their married life. They spent some two years in evangelistic work, and in 1904, Mr. Norton was called to be the religious work director of the Y. M. C. A. in Minneapolis. His work in that connection attracted Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman's attention, so that Mr. Norton was asked in advance to organize the staff of ushers and personal workers for the meetings that Dr. Chapman was to hold in Minneapolis. Mr. Norton's co-operation in the preparation and conduct of this campaign led Dr. Chapman to invite him to go with the party on trial. On April 6th, 1905, a little daughter had come into the Norton home,—Margaret Louise,—whose memory is very dear to the father and mother today. She was permitted to remain with them for only a little while, for on March 25th, 1906, she was taken Home. Mr. and Mrs. Norton then united with the Chapman evangelistic party, and for nearly ten years, until March, 1915,—including two trips around the world,—they gave themselves to evangelistic work in association with Dr. Chapman and Mr. Alexander.

Of all the incidents in these years of travel and

evangelism, it was perhaps a side-trip among the natives of the Fiji Islands in 1913 that made the most profound missionary impression upon the Nortons. They saw the transformation that the Wesleyan missionaries had made, and they saw the evidences of the power of Christ in the lives of the natives. They have never forgotten that journey.

In the Autumn of 1913 they were in Glasgow for three months, in Edinburgh for two months, and then, in 1914, when they were planning a trip through Germany, the war came on.

From this point the story of God's dealings with them and with their fellow-workers is unfolded throughout the chapters of this book. One experience, however, should be introduced just here before the story proceeds. When Mr. Norton was in America, after having felt clear that the war opportunities for evangelism were calling him into that field of service, he sought means for the first year's work. He began in Atlanta to seek the needed funds. He went to Richmond, Va., and while there he asked the Lord for a seal of at least the sum of five dollars upon his purpose, and received over one hundred. He proceeded to Philadelphia and sought to interest Mr. Charles G. Trumbull, the Editor of *The Sunday School Times*, in what he hoped to do in the war-zones.

Mr. Norton felt that it would be necessary to have an American Treasurer for the fund that he was endeavoring to secure, so he asked Mr. Trumbull to accept that responsibility. Mr. Trumbull at once

felt that it was quite impossible for him to do this, but Mr. Norton replied, "Well, all I can say is, that the Lord has, in my prayer, designated you for this service." The Editor seemed impressed when he heard this, but nevertheless, not clear as to his duty. However, after consultation and prayer with friends, he said, "I feel led to accept the Treasurership." Mr. Norton then expressed the hope that *The Sunday School Times* would consider his wife and himself its representatives in evangelistic work among the Belgian soldiers. After further prayer and consultation Mr. Trumbull telephoned to Mr. Norton in New York on the eve of sailing that the paper would count them its representatives in the proposed campaign.

That night in his Bible reading Mr. Norton read, with glad heart and encouraged spirit, these words: "And there went with him a band of men whose hearts the Lord had touched." In the years since then Mr. Trumbull's unfailing support of the work in personal service and through the columns of *The Sunday School Times* has again and again been gratefully acknowledged by the Nortons.

Others were led to join with the Directors in counsel and co-operation in their homeland. In Great Britain through the severe testing times of the war, the Nortons were unfailingly aided and encouraged, as indeed continuously in the later development of the work by Mr. J. Kennedy Maclean, Editor of *The Life of Faith*, Treasurer of the British Council, and by Mr. W. G. Walters, of London,

Secretary, a business man who gave much of his time to the London headquarters during the war.

In America, a council was formed, consisting of the following: Mr. and Mrs. J. Harvey Borton, of Philadelphia—Mr. Borton as chairman of the American Council; Mrs. Robert B. Haines, Jr.; Dr. Howard A. Banks, Secretary; Messrs. D. T. Richman, Edward A. Steele, Ormond Rambo, Mr. and Mrs. Trumbull, and Mr. and Mrs. Philip E. Howard, all of Philadelphia; Mr. William A. Harbison, of Pittsburgh; Mrs. William Borden; Messrs. Walter A. Staub, Sydney T. Perrin, Alwyn Ball, Jr., of New York; Mrs. Lyman Stewart, Dr. R. A. Torrey, of Los Angeles; Mrs. C. H. Greenleaf, of Boston; Mrs. A. G. Wells, of Chicago; Dr. A. C. Dixon, of Baltimore; and Miss Carolyn B. Stephan, the efficient and devoted Assistant Treasurer, in charge of the American office of the Mission.

Over Mr. Norton's desk in Brussels is a Scripture text which should be permitted to recur on page after page of this story, for it gathers into a few words the secret of all that is herein set forth,—“Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” Who knows what increasing measure of service in the spread of the Gospel may yet be granted to a company of the Lord's messengers who live and work and pray in the light of these inspired words of encouragement!

P. E. H.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. THE BEGINNINGS IN LONDON.....	1
II. REACHING THE BELGIAN ARMY.....	19
III. A VISIT TO THE QUEEN.....	31
IV. AMONG THE BOYS AT THE FRONT.....	39
V. THE BEGINNINGS IN BRUSSELS.....	57
VI. WHY BELGIUM?	72
VII. AMONG THE OUT-STATIONS.....	108
VIII. OPEN AIR AND TENT WORK.....	128
IX. AMONG THE CHILDREN.....	143
X. THE WORK FOR WOMEN.....	158
XI. THE BIBLE INSTITUTES.....	181
XII. THE HARVEST.....	201

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
IN THE ASSEMBLY HALL OF THE MISSION IN BRUSSELS	<i>Frontispiece</i>
FOUNDERS AND DIRECTORS OF THE BELGIAN GOSPEL MISSION, RALPH C. NORTON, EDITH FOX NORTON	6
IN THE NORTONS' FOYER IN LONDON.....	20
THE QUEEN OF BELGIUM, AND MR. AND MRS. NORTON	36
MISSION BUILDINGS AT WARQUIGNIES, BRUS- SELS, AND HASSELT.....	66
THE OLD FARM HOUSE AT MARIA HOOREBEKE; YPRES IN 1922; A GLIMPSE OF ANCIENT BRUGES	88
MAP OF THE STATIONS OF THE BELGIAN GOSPEL MISSION, 1924.....	96
HUT HUNTING NEAR YPRES; A PART OF A PUR- CHASE OF 100,000 TESTAMENTS IN THE YARD OF THE HEADQUARTERS, BRUSSELS; A CHIL- DREN'S TENT MEETING IN SELZAATE.....	108

THE MISSION HALL AT ATH; THE MISSION HALL AT OOST ROOSEBEKE; THE CONGREGATION AT LIEGE	116
ISOLINE; MONSIEUR AND MADAME VILAIN.....	124
THE MARKET AT ST. NIKOLAS; A TYPICAL STREET MEETING; A BELGIAN "DOG-MOBILE"	136
THE THURSDAY SCHOOL IN ANTWERP; THE THURSDAY SCHOOL IN BRUGES; A THURSDAY SCHOOL GROUP IN ANTWERP.....	150
STATIONS OF THE MISSION AT BRUGES, DOUR, EECLOO, AND BRAINE-LE-CONTE.....	170
THREE OF THE MISSION HALLS,—LOKEREN, LIEGE, COURTRAI.....	184
A GROUP OF THE MISSION WORKERS.....	192
MAP INDICATING THE WORLD-WIDE POSSIBILI- TIES OF THE BELGIAN GOSPEL MISSION.....	198
KEMMEL HILL IN 1922.....	202

A New Invasion of Belgium

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNINGS IN LONDON

London was a dark area during the war. No one who was not actually in that great city during that period could possibly understand the depth of shadow over the whole area. The streets were crowded with those who had been hard hit by the war. Nearly every family in the homes of Britain was bravely bearing bereavement. Food was scarce, the constant dread of air raids was intense, and no one then in London who now talks of those days hesitates to tell of the awful depression throughout the whole community because of the death lurking in the skies.

The crowd was streaming along the mid-channel of London traffic near Charing Cross Station,—tired men and women with sober faces; soldiers strolling aimlessly; motor-buses crowded inside and out; war-service motors of every sort; and now and then a soldier wearing a trench cap with a little tassel at the front of it, a distinguishing mark of the Belgian uniform.

A soldier with the tasseled trench cap worked his way out of the crowd, turned down quiet little Buckingham Street, entered a doorway a few steps from the Strand, and mounted a winding stair. He did not knock on the door at the head of the stairs, but

because the door had an invitation on it he stepped within.

He found himself in a cheerfully furnished room about twenty-five feet square, with large windows looking out upon the crowded Strand. He saw other soldiers of his army sitting at tables playing chess, or reading, or with the help of a kindly woman reading a little book, with eager, questioning looks upon their faces.

He was welcomed almost before he had crossed the threshold by several workers of the staff in charge there, and in good French, too, which he could understand without the least trouble. They offered him tea and sandwiches, conducted him to a seat, introduced him to others in the room, and soon the loneliness of the crowded streets had fallen away from this Belgian soldier on leave, and he was glad he had answered in this way an invitation on a card handed to him, with a small, strange little book, as he had emerged from Charing Cross Station. He was fresh from the trenches and there were some things out there he hoped he might forget for a little while. This cheery room, and these kindly folk—well, he would have something for once "*très bon*" to write to Jeanne.

That afternoon the little rooms beside the large one ceased business early. The clicking typewriters were silent, the kitchenette was very active, and in the big room the chairs were now rearranged, games were put away, and a stereopticon brought in. The Belgians reformed their line, as it were, and got

ready to listen. A French pastor in London was about to give them a talk on the Life of Christ, illustrated with pictures of places in the Holy Land.

An American visitor in London turned out of the Strand, climbed the stairs, and because he, too, was a bit lonely, he felt a peculiar sense of gratitude and at-home-ness as he stepped into the welcome of that room and that group of Christian workers, and seated himself where he could look into the faces of the Belgians, as the reflected light from the lantern-screen fell upon them.

These boys looked old. They looked still older when the American learned their youthful ages. But the trenches do not make for youth. The wandering American could not quite realize that these men who might easily be his brothers in age were young enough to be his sons. But he, too, grew older by years when he had seen the trenches and the pulverized towns and the smitten, crippled humanity in the pitiful battle-areas of France and Flanders.

It was all different in these pleasant rooms of the Nortons' "Foyer" on the Strand. As the lecturer went on the boys broke in again and again with questions, comments, exclamations,—a living audience, keenly eager for the facts. And let me assure you that it was not in my imagination that under the soft reflected light from the scenes in Jesus' country, and at the mention of his name, these seasoned, tired, old-young fighting men seemed resolved into the kind of soldiery to whom Paul ministered in

his waiting-days in Rome. I watched the play of their emotions, as their faces, somewhat stolid at first, disclosed now in the happy resting time a touch of boyish receptivity and sensitiveness that went to my heart. Do you not think that some such look must have come over the faces of the Galilean fishermen when Jesus talked with them, and on the face of the soldier who guarded Paul, when the imprisoned apostle told him of Jesus?

After the lecture, and a personal talk with the boys, I took a long walk with a young Belgian officer who had been led to Christ by the Nortons' work. He told me of the obstacles he had met, opposition at home,—yes, even contempt,—and how Christ had enabled him to keep on and keep up in his Christian life. We were jostled by the crowd as we talked, enveloped in the mists of that London twilight, and it was my great privilege to testify to the sufficiency of Christ to meet our every need, that soldier's sorest needs, as the young Belgian Christian confided to me the special testings that were pressing in upon him, and the problems that gathered upon his way like the November fog itself.

And when I saw the sin of the streets, the throngs of soldiers coming out of the great terminal, saw Ralph Norton himself speaking to the men on the street, saw the Foyer in operation, and talked with that young officer so intimately and freely, I knew I had a clear obligation to tell these simple—or miraculous?—things I had seen.

But there is much more to tell. I was in Paris

just after the armistice, long enough to see more than once the Foyer there—a part of the Nortons' work—under the care of Pastor A. Blocher, a man of rare spirit and devotion, preaching the pure Gospel in a day and a land where the pure Gospel is none too easily found. His church was in the Rue de Lille, not far from one of the great railway stations. In a large street-floor room of a building which is at once store-space, church, and apartment house, I saw many French soldiers in from the trenches, having bread and coffee at small tables, or sitting in little groups around these tables studying their Testaments under the direction of volunteer helpers.

And how did this evangelizing work in London, Paris, and elsewhere have its beginnings, under the hand of God? It was just as the war came on that Mr. and Mrs. Ralph C. Norton, who were with the Chapman-Alexander evangelistic party, and had been with them in world journeyings for ten years, found themselves in London, in real doubt as to what their next call to service might be. Evangelistic meetings on any large scale were regarded as impracticable because of the tremendous pre-occupation of the people with the insistent demands of war work, and the projected meetings were given up.

With Dr. Chapman's consent the Nortons decided to remain for the time being in England. They believed that the Lord was leading them to a work of soul-winning among the soldiers, then assembling

in the army camps in such enormous numbers. Under the auspices of the Y. M. C. A., the Nortons began to visit the camps, and in this way they were brought into touch with large numbers of men.

“Evangelism in the camps was no easy task,” wrote Kennedy Maclean, in his book “The Apostles of the Belgian Trenches.” “It was quite a common thing for Mr. or Mrs. Norton to arrive in a tent or a hut without any preparation having been made to receive them. Perhaps, to begin with, they would have a long walk from the nearest railway station. Not infrequently they would find the platform occupied by a concert party, or the men would be busy writing letters and playing games. Not readily baffled or discouraged, they would watch and pray for an opening. Then, as soon as it came, Mrs. Norton would sit down at the piano and play over some tune familiar to her audience—with a masterly skill that demanded attention. In a little while she would pass on to some of the sweet hymn tunes associated with the home and the House of Worship, and soon rough voices would join in singing the hymns learned at a mother’s knee, or within the sacred precincts of the Sunday-school.

“When the sobering influences had done their work and produced a better atmosphere, Mr. Norton would rise to speak. Some idea of the blessing that followed this ministry will be gathered from the fact that during one month of meetings, in a certain area about thirty miles from London, no



RALPH C. NORTON
FOUNDERS AND DIRECTORS OF THE



EDITH FOX NORTON
BELGIAN GOSPEL MISSION

fewer than fourteen hundred men professed to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour."

Dr. Howard A. Banks, who was at that time private secretary to the Secretary of the United States Navy, became deeply interested in what the Nortons were doing among the soldiers. He later became the secretary of the Council of the Belgian Gospel Mission. In *The Sunday School Times* of September 4, 1915, Dr. Banks wrote, after an interview with Mr. Norton: "The Nortons are quick to adjust themselves to conditions as they find them. In England they went to the camps, and in France to the hospitals. As Mr. Norton flowed on in his enthusiastic description, he crayoned a word-picture like this:

"Mrs. Norton, after a few words of introduction by the Y. M. C. A. leader or Mr. Norton, is singing that familiar song, 'Tell Mother I'll be There.' The sturdy British soldier lads have their thoughts turned to home—knowing full well that many of them will never see home and the mother again. Europe is serious, and fearfully thoughtful to-day. The whole soldier-audience has practised the song a while, and now a brawny youth of the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders has had the courage to stand up and sing a stanza of it by himself.

"'You did that bravely; but will you really write and tell your mother that?' pleads Mr. Norton. The soldier is the first to accept the invitation. Says another, 'My mother is dead, but I'll tell my father.'

"There are other songs, there is an earnest appeal

by Mr. Norton, and finally comes the Testament distribution with all the heavenly possibilities enfolded between the leaves for soldier boys about to face shells, and dropping bombs from the skies, and torpedoes in the passage of the Channel, and asphyxiating gases, and bullets and bayonets.

“The Coldstream Guards sang the ‘Glory Song’ the night before the fierce battle which so sadly decimated their ranks. There was the quiet weeping of men afterwards over the silences between the ‘adsums’ of the roll-call, but the survivors knew that the souls of some of their brothers-in-arms had gone up to eternal safety and peace in the whirlwind of the battle.

“Making their headquarters in London, the Nortons radiated out to the camps at Bedford, Felixstowe, Caterham, St. Albans, Epsom, and elsewhere. Ninety-one of the six-footers—they have to measure up to this Frederick the Great standard—of the Black Watch Scotch and the Grenadier Guards at Caterham ‘took up the cross and followed Him’ after Mrs. Norton’s singing and Mr. Norton’s preaching. The personal workers were warned that at Epsom they need expect scant results among the university and high school men there,—for it appears to have been a camp of students,—but 125 of these ‘shy and indifferent fellows’ accepted Christ and became Testament readers and distributors.

“From England the Nortons went to France for ten days. At Montmirail they went out to visit the battlefield of the Marne, and unexpectedly ran into

a field hospital of French soldiers. Some of the wounded came from the Legion of Strangers in which there were twenty-six enlisted Americans.

"The French lieutenant who showed Mr. Norton over the battlefield gratefully accepted a pocket Testament. At Chateau Thierry a French captain asked for Testaments for his entire company; at Boulogne an English Red Cross train quickly absorbed 250 Testaments. On the way across the Channel back to England a French official who is a Hebrew said: 'It is a wonderful work. Come back to France. I'll do what I can to facilitate your work.'

" 'Soldiers are repeatedly saying to me,' said Mr. Norton, 'that the terrible scenes through which they pass and the perils which they face make them think of the sin question, of God, and of eternity.' An English soldier told Mr. Norton of a hand-to-hand conflict through which he had emerged. He had bayoneted one of the enemy who was about to kill him. The troops are trained to give their guns a certain twist in order to loose the bayonets from the bodies of the dead or dying, but so sickening was this slaughter to him that he could not bear to follow his instructions; he quickly released the bayonet from his gun-stock and rushed onward in the charge. The horror of an experience like this, the ghastly suffering, the wholesale death of modern war, are making men think as never before in their lives. Into the white-harvest opportunity for soul-winning have gone this faithful, consecrated, God-led young couple."

It was in the light of such experiences as these that Mr. and Mrs. Norton decided that their immediate call was to continue a work among the soldiers wherever God might lead them. They visited America, when the whole question was considered very carefully, and laid before Dr. Chapman. He was reluctant to let the Nortons leave the work which was planned for America, but in March, 1915, they resigned their position, and began to tell their friends throughout America of the needs among the soldiers. In June the necessary money for the first year was in hand, and they were on their way to Great Britain, where they arrived on the twenty-ninth, and soon began their street work, which has led to such extensive evangelization as is now represented by the Belgian Gospel Mission. It was the street work of Testament distribution in London that opened up in God's own way the whole field of the Belgian army, and later Belgium itself to the Nortons.

At the time the Nortons returned to England, an order had been issued by the British military authorities, to the effect that none but British subjects could be employed by the Y. M. C. A. in the British camps. Mr. Norton says that for the first time in his years of evangelistic work, he found himself not wanted anywhere! It was a new experience. But perceiving a new opportunity at hand, he began in the humblest way to do a simple, inconspicuous work, in the name of the Lord.

As the Nortons moved about in the streets of Lon-

don they noticed many soldiers with blue uniforms. When they inquired what army these represented, they found they were Belgian soldiers, thousands of whom were coming to London for such leave as they could get. Mr. Norton learned that the soldiers for the most part spoke French, but he knew nothing about that language. In his university course he had studied Latin and Greek, but not modern languages. However, even though he could not speak in their tongue, he went to a group of Belgian soldiers, one day, and began to give them Gospels and Testaments in French. The boys laughed at him, and at one another, and began to feel in their pockets for a penny or two, for they hardly knew what to do, as he handed them the little books. But he made it plain to them, at least by signs, that he did not want money, but wished them to keep the books as gifts.

Then he found a man who could help him, the porter of the hotel where they were staying, a man who had never been in college, but who spoke three or four languages well. He said to him: "Jack, how do you say, 'Accept this, please,' in French?"

"Why, you say '*Monsieur, voulez-vous accepter ça, s'il vous plait,*'" Jack responded.

Mr. Norton went to his room, practised this phrase, and then filled his left hip pocket with French Gospels secured from the Scripture Gift Mission (which has from the earliest beginnings so generously co-operated with him in this work), and sallied forth into the streets. As he met each Bel-

gian soldier he tendered him a Gospel, and repeated his newly-acquired phrase, "*Monsieur, voulez-vous accepter ça, s'il vous plait?*" The soldiers responded "*Merci, Monsieur.*" This was his second lesson in French. Soon he learned that there were two languages spoken among Belgians, so he said to his new-found Professor of Languages: "How do you say, 'Which do you prefer, French or Flemish?' in French?" "You say, '*Quel preferez-vous, Français ou Flamand?*'" his teacher answered.

This went on until one day a Belgian soldier said, "*C'est la même chose.*" Mr. Norton did not know what he meant. He asked Jack, and found that it meant, "Either one, it is just the same to me." Then one day a man said, "*Combien?*" Mr. Norton was nonplused again. Jack explained that this meant "How much does it cost?" "Tell me how to say that they are free," asked his pupil. "Well, you say, '*C'est gratuit,*' or '*C'est gratuite,*' depending upon whether it is masculine or feminine." "Jack," exclaimed Mr. Norton, "what do I care whether it is masculine or feminine, just so they know it does not cost anything!"

One day another soldier said, "*J'en ai un.*" Again Jack came to the rescue with the explanation that this meant, "I already have one."

In this way Mr. Norton picked up enough phrases to enable him to continue to distribute Gospels, but always under great difficulties. These soldiers who were like lost sheep without a shepherd and were wandering about the streets of London, hearing him

speak a few words of French, thought he understood the language, and would begin a torrent of conversation. So he learned to say, "*Voulez-vous m'accompagner*"—"Please come with me." Thus he would lead them to his wife, who had studied French, and together they would seek to tell these men of the matchless love of Jesus Christ, most frequently reading to them the tenth chapter of John, which seemed to help them most.

Mr. Norton says that one of the best illustrations of foreordination with which he is familiar is the fact that his wife was led, some three years before the opening of the war, against his protestations (because he felt her activities as a worker among women and girls as a member of Dr. Chapman's party was all that her strength permitted her to do), to study French. But the God who foresees and determines, knew that the war would come, and that in His divine plan the Nortons would be on the streets of London, working with the soldiers, and had thus prepared her in the French language, for the task which could not have been accomplished without it.

Dr. R. A. Torrey, who felt at first that Mr. and Mrs. Norton had made a mistake when they went into this war work, said publicly one day, "If I had been choosing workers for this task, I would never have chosen Ralph and Edith Norton;" and Mr. Norton, who sat beside him, said, "Neither would I." "But," Dr. Torrey continued, "God chooses His own workers."

Mr. Norton has repeatedly said that he and his wife are a modern illustration of 1 Corinthians 1: 26-30, "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world hath God chosen to bring to nought things that are . . . but of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption."

Is not this a proof of the fact that all God requires is a willingness of the instrument? He will supply the power and wisdom.

Mrs. Norton says that her husband can do more with what little he knows, than any one of her acquaintance. Since he was once a traveling salesman, he learned not to be content simply to tell his story. He says, of this work on the street, "I used to try to sell goods, and get the names on my order books." He gave away his Testaments, but his devout salesmanship was restless until it could lead these men to accept not only the Book, but the Christ of the Book.

The first Belgian soldier Mr. Norton led to Christ was a boy named Pierre de Wallens. He approached him with his simple stock of French. The boy said, "Thank you," and asked where he might perhaps find some post-cards. Mr. Norton took him to a place where they could be bought, purchased some for him, and then took the boy to the hotel. There he learned that the lad had been shot

through the neck, and that the fact that he was still living was almost a mystery. He said that he had been lying in a hospital in Southampton for three months, and that a chaplain who knew a little French had told him the story of Calvary, which he had never heard before. Mr. Norton gave him a number of Gospels and Testaments at the boy's own request to distribute among his soldier friends.

The incidents of the days in London with the Belgian boys are innumerable. Mr. Norton usually went to Charing Cross station when the trains were coming in, bearing many soldiers, and there he would meet with them and give them a word of greeting, present them with a Gospel or Testament, and invite them to come to the rooms on the Strand.

Mr. Maclean, in describing the personal side of the Nortons' work in London, tells the secret of it all, as an observer and understanding friend: "Love triumphs when everything else fails. It is in relation to love that the Nortons are such living examples of the religion which they preach. Without it, they would never have touched the fringe of the great movement, which has spread so rapidly. The men with whom they have come in contact in London, have been literally loved into the Kingdom; and from that love they have drawn the inspiration that has sent them back to the trenches to win their comrades to a life of holiness.

"It is not the language of hyperbole, but a sober fact to say that many of the Belgian soldiers on leave in London got their first experience of love

when they came in touch with the Nortons. London is a dreary place for the lonely man, the crowded streets serving only to accentuate the sense of isolation which comes over one when there is no familiar face to smile a welcome. That was the unhappy state of many a Belgian boy when he came to Britain's capital on leave. He had nowhere in particular to go, and no one in particular to visit, and so he just wandered about the main streets. Then into such lives, like ministering angels, came Mr. and Mrs. Norton. They invited lonely Belgian lads to their hotel room [then used before the Foyer was opened], which served as work-room, bed-room and sitting-room combined. A rented piano stood in a corner, plants, flags, pictures, books, et cetera, were added to give color and variety, the atmosphere of heaven pervaded the place. Straight from the mud of the trenches many a man has stepped into the rest and freshness of that haven; has enjoyed the luxury of a warm bath, received clean socks, had old ones darned, and missing buttons restored to his clothes. Is it any wonder that surrounded with such kindness, bathed in such an atmosphere of love, hearts should have opened to the Divine love, just as flowers open to the kiss of the sun? The secret of it all is contained in one word, love."

Mrs. Norton has told a little of their first acquaintance with Pierre. She says that he explained how the chaplain of the hospital had spoken to him so kindly about the Lord Jesus Christ and his claims upon him. "He was a big man with such a kind

face,' he said. 'And he only spoke to me once or twice, but as I lay there so many, many weeks, not able to move my head, I thought over very carefully what he had said, and, as I thought, I let Christ come into my heart.

"He told us he had to start his return from Romanism to Protestantism, and then as he was only a babe in Christ, we took some little time confirming and strengthening him in his faith, and showing him the importance of confessing Christ before his comrades, which had not occurred to him before. Of his own acceptance with Christ, he seemed perfectly assured as we explained to him that it implied a belief from the heart. 'Oh, yes,' he said, 'I have it here in my heart,' laying his hand reverently on his heart as he said it. He was delighted to receive a large package of French Gospels, and he was urged to speak a personal word for his Master, as he gave them away to his comrades.

"At last it was time for him to take his train, so we accompanied him to the station, bought him some fruit and sweets to take with him to the trenches, then said good-bye, and he passed inside the gate. All the way down to his train he kept turning back and waving to us, and we waved in return, and then turned back to our hotel with something like a lump in our throat and a mist before our eyes. Brave little Belgian; I wonder if we shall ever see him again!"

Not long afterward a letter came from Pierre, from the Front. He said, "First of all, my most sin-

cere thanks for the great bounty that you have lavished on me, with thanks equally of many soldiers of my company, to whom I have distributed the little book of the Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I have distributed several of these little books also to the French soldiers, therefore I have distributed conscientiously the small evangel. Be pleased to receive, Madame and Monsieur, with my best and most sincere thanks as well the assurance of my faith in Christ."

"In this way," writes Mr. Maclean, "Pierre went back to the trenches with the fire of an apostle burning in his soul. He was the first of the Belgian soul-winners sent out by Mr. and Mrs. Norton. Little did they dream that night, as they turned their feet back to their hotel, that the young soldier from whom they had just parted was but the forerunner of a little army whom God was raising up to witness for him to their fellows. But so it was."

CHAPTER II

REACHING THE BELGIAN ARMY

It was while Mr. and Mrs. Norton were busy with the soldiers at the entrance to Charing Cross Station that they met one who was to become a great helper in their work. As the soldiers arrived at the station, Mr. Norton would meet them with a bundle of Gospels. The soldiers were usually taken from the station to the Belgian headquarters in the city omnibuses set apart for that service. If Mr. Norton missed them at the station he would go to headquarters and there give away the Gospels in French and Flemish.

Mrs. Norton thus described the first meeting with the young man, Peter Van Koeckhoven. "It was on such an occasion that he met Peter, who was standing before the headquarters, talking to a couple of friends, when the Gospel was handed to him. After thanking the donor, he commenced speaking to my husband in English, telling him that he had picked up the language in the trenches. After watching the distribution of Gospels for a little time, he said rather wistfully, 'If you have any of those little books to spare, sir, the men in the trenches where I am returning soon would so appreciate those. They have nothing to read, and these are just what they need.' It was a joy to take him to 15 Strand, and provide him with a package containing a hundred Flemish Gospels of Mark."

“Our first letter from him was received on the fourteenth of August, 1915, and in it he said: ‘Dear Sir: You remember that Belgian soldier to whom you gave a parcel containing one hundred of pamphlets on the Holy Scripture. As soon as I got back I distributed them among my comrades, and, believe me, they were all delighted to have received such a booklet. You will understand me, that I didn’t sell [them] but I gave them to Christian boys and to those who had any like for Christianity. So I have none more, and as I think it is well worth doing, and you will think it too, I hope, please send me some others for instance, St. John or St. Matthew, but if possible in Flemish language. Dear sir, hereby I close my letter for there is hard work to be done, and hoping that this awful war and the murdering of our brethren will soon cease and be finished. I remain, dear sir, your obedient servant and Belgian soldier, Peter Van Koeckhoven.’ ”

Peter showed his evangelistic zeal by reaching practically his whole regiment with the Gospel and the Word of Salvation. He was not satisfied to reach only those just around him. He began to enlist some of his comrades in the same work. He would go just as far as he was allowed to go through the trenches, distributing the Gospels, and telling his fellow soldiers how to use them. All the while on these journeys he would be investigating to see whether the boys who already had received Gospels or Testaments were reading them. Peter was constantly asking for more of the little Gospels. In one



DURING THE WAR DAYS IN THE NORTONS' FOYER IN LONDON

letter he wrote: "I hope you will excuse the nuisance which perhaps I occasion you, but God will bless you for the work you do, and for the chance you give the soldiers of knowing the right way to salvation. Ask any man who is a Gospel reader, and who is on the Front or has been there, and he will assure you that the best consoler in the moments of distress is the Gospel. I and my comrades experience this many times."

Again he said: "We have a League of daily Bible readers, but it has no name. Would you not give us a name, and perhaps have some cards made for the men to sign, then we could keep in closer touch with them?"

After much prayer, and after consultation with the Secretary of the Scripture Gift Mission, Mr. Francis Brading, from whom the Nortons were securing their supplies of French and Flemish Gospels, and who was also arranging to publish for them a New Testament in French with special evangelistic material included within its covers, they gave Peter's League a name. In French it is "La Ligue des Saintes Ecritures," and in English, "The Scripture League."

A little card was prepared with a place for the soldier's name, his military and his home address, and a pledge which said that the soldier would agree to carry and read daily some portion of a Bible, Testament, or Gospel, and would try to make a special study of one verse,—after the general plan of

Mr. and Mrs. Charles M. Alexander's "Pocket Testament League."

When a soldier sent the stub of the card to the Nortons to show that he had finished reading his Gospel, he was given a complete New Testament in either French or Flemish. At that time there were forty soldiers at the Belgian Front interested in distributing the Gospel to their comrades, and at once samples of this material were sent to them. The responses were immediate. Peter wrote when he first received the news of the organizing and naming of his League: "The League which you proposed me in your dear letter has been started today, and I had the first reunion two hours ago. I invited the best workers who are working together with me in distributing the little Gospels among the soldiers, in and out of the trenches, and you'll soon have the best results with your noble mission. I am now going to keep the men who read their Gospels together. I'm going to have their names, and so hope they'll soon know each other better, as your Gospels have now been distributed in nearly two battalions, and soon will be through all the regiment."

Many incidents occurred as the work went on among the boys in the trenches, under the zealous enterprise and evangelistic zeal of men like Peter and Pierre. In fact, before the close of the war there were some fifteen thousand men in the Belgian army who were members of the League. Just the handing of a Testament to a Belgian soldier

on the street of London resulted in the sowing of the seed of a great harvest in an army where probably ninety-five per cent. of the men had never known the Gospel at all. The time during which the headquarters were maintained in London, the time which the Nortons spent at the Front with the soldiers, and indeed the whole period of the war itself, is a story of multiplying incidents of God's guidance and loving care, as workers went forward with the spread of the Gospel, and ministered in every way to the needs of the soldiers.

The Nortons well knew the desolate conditions in the trenches and over the battle fronts, and the loneliness which was one of the heaviest burdens of all for the soldiers to bear. They believed that they were called primarily to a ministry of evangelism among the boys, but they did not fail to recognize the blessings that could come from ministering to their physical needs. Therefore, in doing this, they made these needs widely known in America, and an example of what was accomplished is found in some of the incidents that Mrs. Norton tells of the distribution of Christmas boxes to soldiers at the Front.

"Christmas has come and gone," wrote Mrs. Norton, "and the hearts of over ten thousand Belgian soldiers have been made glad by the loving gifts of American friends. For to more than ten thousand Belgian soldiers at the Front have gone Christmas boxes, and the letters that have poured into our little offices in a steady stream since the 22d of

December have given us such touching proof of the undying gratitude of these soldiers that we feel we must share them with the American benefactors who have rendered such happiness possible.

“Apropos of these letters, we might say that for a Christmas present we received over 300 grateful letters from Belgian soldiers, and over 265 as a New Year’s gift.

“As to the contents of the boxes themselves, they were somewhat varied, as in war-time one must take pretty much what one can get, and oftentimes when supplies of one article were exhausted another had to be substituted; but each box contained seven or eight articles, of which the staples were jam, chocolate, meat *pâtés*, cheese, and sweets. Also we had prepared for insertion in each box an envelope holding two Gospels, a French and a Flemish, a little story-tract in French, a booklet in French explaining *La Ligue des Saintes Ecritures*, and two cards, one in French, one in Flemish, for the soldier to sign if he wished to join this little League. Also we had prepared an attractive Christmas card, bordered in red, with a sprig of holly in one corner and the lettering green, which read:

“Your American friends send you their best wishes for Christmas and the New Year. This gift is given to you by the intermediary of M. Ralph C. and Mme. Edith F. Norton, 15 Strand, London, W. C.’

[this last as a bait for future letters from them].

“One of our workers describes the reception of the boxes by the men of his company :

“ ‘They were so pleased ; at first they did not know where they came from, but they quickly recognized the well-known name of our adopted parents. They are all very grateful, and I thank you equally for them. The happy day of Christmas we have assembled altogether exactly at midnight ; we have altogether raised our prayers to our dear Lord in the honor of His happy birthday. Never was fervor so great, and after our prayers I addressed a few good words in your name.’

“The gratitude in all the letters is warmly expressed toward the good American friends, and many desire us to act as interpreters of their thanks and good wishes to the generous donors. ‘Be assured,’ one writes, ‘that among the Belgian soldiers, all will remember forever the generosity of the citizens of the United States.’

“Many have looked past us and past the American friends to the One who is the real giver ; and as one has put it : ‘I am far from all other help and from my parents, but I see that God has not forgotten me. He sends some charitable souls to succor His children deprived so long of all other help. In God I place all my confidence.’ And as another : ‘I received to-day my first package since the beginning of the war, and that from persons that I have never seen, but I recognize the fraternity which unites all

Christians, forged together by the love of Christ.'

"But the last letter from which we quote perhaps made us happiest of all, for this man said to us:

"I have been a free-thinker before the war, and, although my parents were godly Christian people, yet they could never influence me nor persuade me to follow their teachings. Being at the war since the beginning, abandoned of all, I had grown hard and bitter, believing in nothing and no one; in some unknown manner, your Christmas box reached me, and I read the little Gospel inside and I said to myself: "Somebody has thought of me; then somebody still cares for me." And when I read that you would gladly give any spiritual counsel to men who so desired, I am writing to you with a heart hungry for that which you have to give. Is it not wonderful that what my dear parents before the war were never able to do in turning me to Christ, the bounty and kindness of American friends have accomplished? So will you tell me please how I might become a Christian.'"

It was not enough that the Nortons should be reaching their Belgian boys by mail, and in the London foyer provided for the soldiers on leave. The American evangelists wanted to work among the soldiers of their big family at the Front, to bring comfort and encouragement to them, and to

open the way for wider evangelization. They knew, and did not underrate, the difficulty of arranging for this. But the Lord was opening the way, and it was through the help of the Belgian Minister of State, and his wife, Monsieur and Madame Vander-velde, that the necessary authorization was secured.

"We lost no time," wrote Mrs. Norton, "in making the preparations for our trip, and the first day of March, 1916, left London for Folkestone, where we took our cross-channel boat. Two things in regard to our voyage pleased us mightily. The first was that we were sailing under our proper colors. Our papers, handed us at Folkestone, by the Belgian Commandant at that place, bore the inscription, 'M. et Mme. Ralph C. Norton, Missionaries.' We were so glad not to be traveling merely as newspaper correspondents, but as missionaries of the Cross. The second thing was, that although not high government officials, but humble missionaries, we were accorded all the privileges and courtesies shown to the Military, which thing was true of the whole two months of travel.

"Our trip across the Channel, by a route only open now to the Military, was made on a boat carrying only officers; we were practically the only civilians. The trip, although only occupying about an hour and a half, was intensely interesting, and fortunately the quietness of the sea permitted us to enjoy the interest of the scene. The ship's living cargo of hundreds of officers being such a precious one, every precaution was taken to guard against

submarine peril. A torpedo destroyer preceded us, another followed close in our wake, other boats lingered near the vessel's path, and overhead four or five airships kept vigilant watch. Immediately after sailing the official order was given for all officers to don their life preservers, and we followed suit, glad for the added security they seemed to impart.

"Amongst our luggage was one large box filled with comforts for our Belgian boys, donated by different friends—mufflers, socks, gloves, wristlets, hand-knitted, also khaki handkerchiefs, puttees, and other things the soldier prizes and needs. I might say that it has been this interest in the material needs of the soldiers, supplying them with comforts, entertaining them when on leave in London, and the many offices we have been able to perform for them, that has commended us to the Belgian authorities, and has so facilitated our soul-saving work among them.

"From Boulogne, where we disembarked, we proceeded to Calais, and there we held our first reunion with the members of the *Ligue des Saintes Ecritures*. Months before, a soldier who had received from us a little Gospel handed it to a gendarme (military police) when passing through Calais, and the gendarme being touched and helped, wrote to us for others for his fellow-gendarmes. In replying we told him of the League for Belgian soldiers, by becoming a member of which he and his comrades could secure a complete New Testa-

ment. The idea pleased him, and he became a member and soon became actively engaged in enlisting his fellow-gendarmes. When we visited Calais, over fifty of the gendarmes had become members, and their latest recruits to the League were the two chiefs of the gendarmeries, one an adjutant.

“We held short services at both gendarmeries the same evening, and were enthusiastically received at both places. The little services were very short and informal; they were bound to be, for it fell to my lot as the possessor of all the French in the family to conduct them.

“After arriving at La Panne [the seaside war-capital of unconquered Belgium], where we had written to reserve a room, we settled down to await the coming of our boys. For before leaving London we had written over fifty letters to our Belgian soldiers at the Front to meet us for a day or so of reunion at La Panne, stating that we would remain there for two weeks in case they could not leave their regiment at a stated time.

“Their letters, after hearing that we were actually coming to La Panne, were fairly ecstatic. One wrote, ‘Every day now will seem like a month, until I see you at La Panne.’

“The first day there one boy walked fifteen miles through snow and mud to spend an hour and a half with us. He had never seen us, but had written us months before asking for a Testament, and had commenced the Testament distribution among his

comrades. Other boys were writing telling us what days to expect them, and a glorious vista was spread out before us.

“All suddenly the blow fell.

CHAPTER III

A VISIT TO THE QUEEN

“The second day of our stay a Belgian official called upon us. We held a letter of introduction to him, and he was most anxious to make our stay enjoyable. We stated to him our desires. We desired to visit the trenches, we desired an interview with the Queen, we desired most of all the opportunity to remain in La Panne long enough to see our boys. We had been informed before reaching La Panne that to remain in that place longer than two days was never granted to civilians, but in view of our letters of indorsement, it might be made possible.

“However, the official kindly but firmly proceeded to quench all our hopes. We could not see the Queen, it was quite impossible to remain longer than one extra day, which he would grant us himself, and to visit the trenches was absolutely unheard of.

“He left us, and we betook ourselves to prayer. If it was His will,—all this disappointment,—well and good. But we regretted so deeply the disappointment to our boys, who would tramp many weary miles to visit us only to find us gone. And we couldn't quite feel that God had brought us all the way to our journey's end only to let us miss that for which we had come.

"We had another letter of introduction to present to another official, and in our extremity we turned to this new friend to help us, and in the meantime we kept praying. Our final day arrived, and with it hope of remaining longer died. We felt in some inscrutable way God was to be glorified by our great disappointment and that of our boys, and we bowed to His will. Our things were packed and we were awaiting the motor which Headquarters was kindly sending to convey us back to Dunkerque.

"Suddenly, about six-thirty in the evening, a messenger arrived. A messenger from the Queen, from the Villa Royal. What it might portend we could not know. We knew our friend the second official had said he would do for us what he could, but this was the first suggestion that his efforts were bearing fruit.

"The messenger proved to be a very military looking major-in-waiting, but he was very gracious as he explained to us that Her Majesty would be pleased to receive us immediately at the Villa Royal.

"La Panne, perhaps I should explain, is only a little distance from the firing line, not farther than fifteen or twenty miles from any part of the Belgian front. At night it is possible to see plainly the 'starlights' thrown up from the battlefield, and to hear the roar of the guns. During the day we could watch air fights between the Belgian and German airplanes, seeing the shrapnel burst into balls of flame, and die into tufts of white cloud, leaving dozens of white patches in the sky, among which the

airplanes seemed to be darting quite fearlessly and unafraid. And everywhere, through the little streets and over the dunes, crowds of Belgian soldiers daily throng the little seaside war capital of free Belgium, La Panne.

“Here come certain regiments of the Belgian soldiers for their ‘Grand Repos,’ or long rest back of the lines, at stated intervals; and here, month in and month out, live the King and Queen of the Belgians, on the little strip of territory still remaining to them. Living lives of the greatest simplicity, they share in a large measure the hardships of the soldiers. Are certain trenches flooded with water, in which, notwithstanding, the soldiers must keep their vigil? King Albert will presently appear, making his way through the water and mud, to cheer his brave soldiers by his presence.

“And the Queen herself is to be encountered almost any place along the lines. ‘Always,’ said one soldier, ‘she asks us about our families, and if we have any request to make we always make it to her, and she writes it down.’ Many a boy whom we have met in hospital at La Panne or later in England, tells us, ‘The Queen called to see me, and she herself dressed my wound.’ For daily she goes to the great Hospital de L’Ocean, and herself dresses the wounds of the soldiers. Another of our boys told us that when he was decorated (he bears the highest order of the Belgian army, the Chevalier of the Order of Leopold), that it was the Queen who pinned on his decoration, and wept as she did it. And the King

said to him, 'I would rather give you this decoration than to any general in my army.'

"Farther up the beach from our hotel, nestled among the sand dunes, stand the two villas set aside for royal use. Along the whole sea front are stretched barbed wire entanglements; in front of our hotel was a newly prepared trench, guarded by sentry, and back and forth along the sea front day and night ride the mounted police keeping watch.

"It was to the Villa Royal that we were to proceed that night for our interview with the Queen. It would never do to keep a Queen waiting, so as we hastily emerged from our hotel, after a quick change of toilette, we commandeered the first motor car in sight. It belonged to a Belgian officer, but 'It is for a visit to the Queen,' and the car was ours.

"We were met at the entrance of the larger villa by an officer, and conducted through to the back, where we crossed to the smaller building and entered, from the back, the second villa, which is the residence of their majesties.

"In the vestibule another officer met us, and throwing open a door to our right, announced us to the Queen. We stood in a comfortably furnished drawing room, and standing near a table with a softly shaded lamp we saw Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth. She advanced graciously to meet us, shaking hands with us and showing us to seats on either side of herself.

"It may never be our privilege to meet another Queen, but at least we have seen one who fully

graced the title. Frail and little she seemed, and infinitely sad, and so gentle and kindly. When she spoke, in excellent English, she spoke very slowly, and so softly that one had to lean forward to catch every word. But every word was gracious, sympathetic, interested. She seemed to be not the great lady, but only the tender woman whose heart yearned over her soldiers, and who could appreciate deeply that which two others who also loved the soldiers were striving to do for them. She encouraged us to speak of our work.

“‘Your Majesty,’ we said, ‘we are trying to do what we can for Belgium and for the soldiers. We, and other friends who aid us, are seeking to provide for their comforts in many ways; we are providing a home in London for many who come to us on leave, and we are trying to be to some of them in place of their families, who have been lost to them since the beginning of the war.’

“‘But you are most kind,’ she responded in her soft voice.

“Then with a little inward prayer for wisdom, ‘But also, Your Majesty,’ we continued, ‘we are trying to meet the spiritual needs of the men. Our American friends have made it possible for us to give to your soldiers copies of the New Testament in French and Flemish, knowing what comfort and help these little books would be to the men.’ ‘Books like this,’ my husband added, producing from a coat pocket one of the little khaki-covered Testaments in French, and tendering it to Her Majesty.

"She accepted it with murmured thanks, took a few seconds to look it through, then retaining her hold on it, said, 'But I think it is very nice for the soldiers to have such a book, and you are very kind to give it to them,' then added, 'Might I keep this copy?' We hastened to assure her of our pleasure at her acceptance of the little book.

"One thought was never out of our sub-consciousness. 'We must leave La Panne to-night, and we shall miss seeing our boys,' this was the unhappy refrain.

"Then with another fervent little inward prayer, 'Your Majesty, we are very sad to-night, because we must leave La Panne, without seeing the boys we came to see, and we know they too will be sad.' Then we told her something of the more than fifty boys to whom we had written and whom we were expecting to see, as permission was given them to travel the few miles from the Front to La Panne.

"She listened with the closest attention, and seemed to be thinking deeply. At the close of our plea, I had an inspiration. In my bag was a letter from one of our boys, which I had just received. Producing it, 'Would Your Majesty read that?' I asked, handing her the little letter.

"This is what she read: 'Very Dear Parents: I have received with great pleasure your letter, announcing to me your arrival to-day at La Panne. I am very happy to hear it. I am hastening immediately to ask of my lieutenant if there will be a possibility of my going to see you, being on picket duty



THE QUEEN OF BELGIUM (ON THE LEFT OF THE GROUP OF THREE), MRS. NORTON AND MR. NORTON, AT THE ORPHANAGE, "JARDIN MARIE JOSE," AT WINCKEN

and for the moment out of the trenches. My lieutenant is very kind, and I think to have the permission on Monday or Tuesday. In awaiting the great pleasure to meet you again, receive, Dear Parents, the loving regards of your son, René.'

" 'He calls you his parents,' she said after finishing the letter and handing it back.

" 'Yes, Your Majesty,' we responded, 'and we are proud and happy to be father and mother to scores of the Belgian soldiers.'

" 'I will see what can be done about giving you an extension of time,' were her next words; 'do not leave your hotel after your return until you have heard from me.' Then we chatted a little while longer. She expressed her gratitude and that of the King for all America had done for the Belgians.

" 'The King loves Americans,' were her exact words. She told us that Mr. Roosevelt had sent her a copy of his latest book, in which she was greatly interested. Then after an interview of close to a half hour, we arose to go. Again she shook hands with us, and the Queen's own private car took us back to our hotel.

"An hour after our return an orderly from the Queen appeared, with a memorandum to the effect that we were given permission to remain in La Panne until the 17th, or ten days longer. We had asked for a week! The next day the official permission was sent to us. Two weeks later, when passing through Calais, the English detective detailed to aid the French officials in examining passports, said to

us: 'Don't tell me you have been all this time in La Panne; for goodness' sake, how do you ever manage it?'

"We didn't tell him how, for he would not have understood. But we knew the reason. Our times were in *His* hands."

CHAPTER IV

AMONG THE BOYS AT THE FRONT

“During the first three days two of our boys were on rest in La Panne, and so were with us almost constantly. One of these was René (not the René of the letter). We had encountered them the first night after our arrival; they caught sight of us, and came pelting down the sand dunes to meet us. None of our boys has a greater love for the Master, and a passion for prayer, than has René. Each night at the hotel we finished up our evening with our boys with the reading of the Bible and prayer, in which each joined. The night after permission was given for us to remain, René was jubilant.

“‘But I expected you would stay,’ was his comment, ‘because I have asked our Lord Jesus to let you stay, every day, and I counted on Him to do it.’

“We had a permanently enlarged table reserved for our use in the dining-room; sometimes there was one boy with us, sometimes there were ten. The hotel where we stopped, one of the two or three still open, and not converted into hospitals, was frequented almost wholly by officers. Common soldiers were rarely seen within its walls, for five cents a day army pay doesn’t permit a soldier to stay at a hotel, however reasonable its charges may be. The soldiers slept on the straw in their own quarters, and ate the army rations of potatoes and meat and

sour bread (Joffre bread, the boys call it, because it comes from France. English bread is Kitchener bread, but they do not get this luxury often.)

“But when our boys arrived to visit us, fresh from the trenches, unwashed and mudstained, they shared with us what comforts we enjoyed. Some of them had a permission to remain for two days; these were the lucky ones. One boy, Jean, proudly showed us his pass; it was made out for the soldier, Jean Smolders, to travel to La Panne, to visit his parents! The officers started a little at first, as we headed our procession of Belgian soldiers into the dining-room, but soon came to appreciate the situation and to show us and them every courtesy. Informality reigns in a hotel such as that, and soon it came to be that if we ran out of bread at our table,—as I must confess we were constantly doing, for our soldiers had good appetites for the delicious Belgian bread and real butter,—if an officer at the next table heard our desire expressed, he would rise from his own table to bring us what we desired.

“One morning in La Panne there came a knock at the door, and Louis entered. Louis we had met in London, months before, lost and without money. We kept him with us until he must return to the Front, and ever after he was our loving ‘son,’ and an ardent follower of and worker for the Lord Jesus. When the door opened to his radiant face, we both exclaimed, ‘Why, it’s Louis!’ Then, in the next breath, ‘How did you get here?’ For we knew he

was on rest in France, some thirty miles from La Panne.

"His answer was simple and direct, 'The good God sent me.' He had only two hours to stay with us, as he must be back to his quarters the same night. A little inquiry revealed the fact that he had come all the distance by bicycle over almost impassable roads, leaving his place at six o'clock in the morning.

" 'I hope you had a good rest last night, before making this hard trip,' I suggested.

" 'Oh, I was on sentry duty by the sea all last night,' came his response.

"One night brought to us Corporal Bogaert, who wears the insignia of "l'Ordre de Leopold." He has been one of our best workers, and had wonderful things to tell us. With two comrades he has been conducting Gospel meetings in the trenches. 'At first they threw things at us,' he told us, 'but now they all listen.' He told us of a comrade whom he had led to Christ. 'I was with him laying barbed wire entanglements at the outpost,' he said, 'when one night he was wounded. He fell with a bullet in his knee, and when I hastened to bandage it as best I could he said to me, 'I'm glad I have my Bible with me to-night!'

"Another boy bicycled twenty miles to see us, to ask us about some points of religion that were troubling him. I think I have never seen any one with such a thirst for the things of God. And he only a boy of nineteen, with only an hour to stay,

and forty miles to travel, to spend with us that hour.

“One thing that gave us great joy at La Panne was that our boys who were there were constantly bringing to us ‘new recruits’ to be themselves led to Christ and then to be enlisted in the service for Him, of the *Ligue des Saintes Ecritures*. What wonderful times we had in the evenings, with them all gathered around us, listening to the Word of God, drinking in all the good news of salvation.

“René, of whom I have previously spoken, became greatly stirred up and worked energetically getting new members for the *Ligue* every day, as well as enlisting his comrades in the service. We had a wonderful letter from him after our return to England, in which he told us that almost every man in his company, fully 250, had promised to accept Christ as Saviour. So faithful and unremitting has been his toil.

“To cap the climax, our little Pierre, our first Belgian soldier, came to us on our last day. It was indeed a happy reunion, one that we shall never forget. Then altogether we went to the little horse tram that was to take us to Adinkerke, where we caught our train for Dunkerque. Our boys were almost in tears as they said good-bye, but we left them and the little seaside place that we had come to love for its associations, with genuine grief, but also with hearts overflowing with gratitude and praise to God for the wonders he revealed to us

there in the lives of these Belgian soldiers whom we love."

This was not the only visit that the Nortons were enabled to make to the Belgian Front, nor were these experiences briefly narrated here the only notable experiences that were given to them among their soldier families.

Upon their return to England it was made very clear to them that the work with the Foyer in London as the center must be greatly enlarged, as it was the very hour when the most could be done to reach the Belgian army. They, therefore, returned to America in June, 1916, and during the summer months they spoke at many Bible conferences. In September, Mrs. Norton returned to London to carry on the work, and Mr. Norton remained in America until May, 1917, in order to thoroughly present the opportunity to Christian people throughout the land. The work had grown so rapidly that it was necessary to make provision for its enlargement, at the hands of interested American and British friends. When Mr. Norton returned to London he found the work well established, with a secretarial staff of four persons installed, and the offices considerably outgrown.

Shortly after his arrival in London more roomy quarters were taken and these became the home of the British and Allied Soldiers Evangelistic Campaign until the close of the war. Here was a meeting room, a recreation and rest room where Belgian soldiers found spiritual help and hours of profitable

recreation. And in the same group of rooms were offices for the workers, and a snug kitchen where the simple refreshments provided for the soldiers might be prepared. In September, 1917, Mr. and Mrs. Norton made a trip to America, remaining there until December of that year, when they again returned to London. It was on this journey that the Nortons shared in the experience of Atlantic travelers who learned what it meant to escape the torpedo attacks of the lurking submarines. Of this experience Mrs. Norton writes:

“Our visit to the Front and our experience under shell fire we would count among the least of the dangers we have passed. ‘The terror by night’ has been an unceasing menace, and in our tiny flat in the heart of London we have not been free from that ‘terror’ for the past two years. Zeppelin raids, daylight airplane raids, and lastly the terrible moonlight ‘Gotha’ raids. We have been through them all, at the very heart of things.

“The last raid shortly before our sailing for America, in early September, occurred just before midnight on a beautiful moonlight night. A slight haze obscured the face of the sky, and the raiders had everything in their favor. We were aroused from our slumbers by the distant boom of falling bombs. It is not possible to misinterpret that ominous sound when once you have heard it, and, half-awake, we stumbled to our feet. Nearer came the mighty crashes as the great birds of prey directed their flight toward us. We knew there was no time to descend to lower levels of safety, so just there with

our backs against the stout inner wall we waited, and one of us prayed audibly, 'Oh, Lord, if we can serve Thee better by life than by death, save us.'

"All around us the bombs were falling with hideous detonations. Surely the next one would descend on our dwelling. But no, the crashes became fainter and the droning of the great machines, like great bees overhead, grew less distinct, and at last faded away in the distance.

"Realizing that we were indeed safe, we dressed and descended to see what devastation had been wrought. Around us in every direction, not so very many yards away, were the huge excavations caused by the explosions. Ambulances and fire engines were dashing in every direction, and we, looking up with thankful hearts, praised Him whose Angel had been 'encamping around about us to deliver us.'

"Then came the day for sailing when the terrors of the deep must be faced. How terrible these dangers are one can only realize who has personally passed through the danger zone at sea. The scanty passenger list, the formidable preparations on board ship all brought it home to us. The military precautions were thorough and impressive, and of the suspense of the ensuing days and nights I shall say that only His garrisoning and enfolding peace could have rendered it endurable."

And Mr. Norton thus describes a memorable experience of God's loving care on this voyage:

"It was my invariable custom, previous to these sea voyages, to seek from the Lord assurance that if

it was His will, the ship would not be torpedoed. Upon leaving London for Liverpool, from whence our boat was to sail on July 9th, the Lord had given me Job 5: 19, 20, 'He will deliver thee in six troubles; yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee. In famine he shall redeem thee from death, and in war from the power of the sword,' as His assurance of freedom from submarine perils. As was scheduled, we sailed from Liverpool on the S. S. Philadelphia on Saturday, July 9, 1917, and on Sunday morning we were speeding rapidly ahead on our zig-zag course, south of Ireland. I was awakened about four o'clock to find the phrase from Isaiah 54: 17, 'No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper,' running through my mind. I felt pressed to arise for meditation and prayer.

"All through the hours of this early morning meditation, this passage stood out and seemed to pulse and throb with meaning. After breakfast I had returned to my cabin for a further time of prayer, and about eleven o'clock the Spirit of God very clearly directed me to turn to Job 5: 19, 20 again. My mind was shuttling back and forth between, 'No weapon formed against thee shall prosper,' and 'He shall deliver thee . . . in times of war from the power of the sword.' Just then my wife rushed in, and with a startled cry said, 'Submarine! We are being torpedoed!'

"She had been standing near the gunner's mate on the port side of the ship. He had seen the torpedo coming, and had shouted, 'Torpedo, port, amid-

ships!' The man on the forward watch had also seen it, and the lightning quickness of the Captain's order had already swung the ship toward the torpedo. As we rushed out of our cabin, the guns were pounding away in the direction from which it had come, and afterwards the gunner who first saw it, said it had shot by, twenty yards abaft ship.

"I have, today, still marked in my Bible, just below this quotation from Job, the following words: 'Assurance before sailing. I was reading same when submarine attacked, Sunday morning, 7/10/17, 11:30 A. M.'"

The Nortons upon their return to England from this journey addressed themselves to the privilege of administering the help gathered largely in America for sending to the Belgian Army thirty-two thousand Christmas boxes, twenty-five thousand of which were intended for the Belgian soldiers at the Front, and seven thousand to interned Belgian soldiers in Germany. They had ordered these boxes before they left for America, and thus had practically depleted their treasury. But they went out in faith, and their faith was fully rewarded.

At this time in London the offices were sending out five hundred to a thousand letters a week to the men at the Front, and the Foyer was then supported at the cost of about one thousand dollars a month, in addition to the cost of the hundreds of Testaments and Gospels sent out each week. There was a deeper purpose than even the necessary physical relief represented by the Christmas boxes intended for the

soldiers. It was intended that these boxes should always carry copies of the Word of God, and the Nortons were beginning to believe that it might well be within the purpose of God that they were to share in a work of evangelization for Belgium after the war, and they well knew that hearts would be more open for the reception of the Gospel because of the recollection of all that was done for the soldiers during their time of distress.

After these thirty-two thousand Christmas boxes were all ready for presentation, by some adverse influence, it was required, upon arrival at Le Havre (at that time the basis for army supplies) to open each box and take out the Gospels. Both the evangelists went to the spot and pressed for the leaving in of the Gospels, but it was to no avail. However, the card of Christmas greeting was left in, and the restriction led to a more wonderful work of distribution of the Word than could have been done otherwise.

"I shall never forget that day," writes Mr. Norton, "the 22nd of February, Washington's birthday, and how after the banquet with General Gillain and his staff, we were escorted to the square. General Gillain gave Mrs. Norton his arm, I followed with his Chief of Staff, and he presented us to each officer. What a sight it was to see the men pass by, each one receiving his delayed Christmas box! One soldier demanded of Peter as Mrs. Norton passed, 'What Queen is that?' and another said, 'I did not

think anyone in the world cared for me. This is the first gift I have received.' The tear-dimmed eyes of more than one soldier gave proof of his appreciation. The General himself was moved to tears at the sight.

"The distribution closed, the band struck up 'La Brabanconne,' the national hymn of Belgium, and everyone came to attention. This was stirring enough, but to us a more moving and beautiful incident followed, for the band changed to 'The Star Spangled Banner,' and not only did the soldiers salute it, but a cheer broke from the crowd. Peter said to Mrs. Norton, 'Mother, it was too much for me when they played your national anthem, and I remembered all it meant for our country and our God! It was a bit too much for the Americans also!'

"General Gillain requested that every soldier who received a gift should write and thank us, so letters began to flood our offices in London, until at one time we had five thousand letters on hand, and Satan had defeated his own purpose, because immediately we enclosed Gospels, and sent them to each one who wrote us, which made the touch more personal and forceful."

There were those who questioned whether it was well to rely very much upon this form of introduction to the soldiers lest they might be encouraged too much to depend upon material gifts. However, the Nortons were not overlooking that possible dan-

ger, and at no time did they let the giving of material supplies proceed without the corresponding presentation of the Gospel itself. One of the most intelligent and devoted Christian boys of the Nortons' big family ventured to request of them the gift of a khaki undershirt. They promptly complied with the request, but almost immediately received a second letter from the lad, long before he could have received the gift, in which he said, 'Please forgive me for my letter and the request that I made in it. I feel very much ashamed and ask your pardon. You have for me the sweetest of all virtues of friendship—indulgence—while I have nothing but reproaches for myself, when I think of the way I have treated you. Order me what your heart dictates in the way of punishment and I will obey you. There is only one kind of punishment that I could not bear, and that would be for your friendship toward me to become cold.'

No, it was not merely material aid that seemed to interest the boys in the trenches. Hundreds of letters that came to the Nortons in London offices were of the same type with the following:

*"My Dear Brothers in Christ:—*I have a serious problem to solve, and I have prayed to the Holy Spirit to guide me.

"I have told you already that I belong to an old Catholic family. My brother-in-law is an officer in the Dutch army, and it is through him that I receive letters from my family in invaded Belgium.

"I had told my father about the religion which I had taken as mine; that is, the true Protestant religion. He answered that if I denied the religion of my fathers, he in his turn would deny me. He is very autocratic, and I shall never succeed in making him understand that he is in the wrong.

"It is hard indeed to grieve my parents, and to raise an insurmountable barrier between them and me, but I think it is harder still to offend God, the Almighty Father, and to refuse the true light which He sheds.

"Knowing so well my father's character, I know that he will never pardon me—but I will do my duty towards God.

"I hope, dear brothers, that you will be so kind as to advise me about what I am to do, and whatever may be your advice, I will act on it, trusting to Providence for the future.

"Your respectful and obedient servant in Christ,
"JOSEPH F."

Then, too, so many soldiers who had received the privileges and the blessings of the Foyer in London wrote such grateful letters, that there could be no question about the elements of the work that had most deeply impressed these men, who were undergoing physical and spiritual privation to such a degree as can hardly be imagined among those who were never actually at the Front. One of these letters had special significance as coming from a Belgian adjutant, who, after having been wounded,

was busy with military duties in England, and who had been coming to the Nortons' offices during their absence in America. He helped in various ways, and especially by answering many of the Flemish letters.

*"Dear Mr. and Mrs. Norton:—*One of my English friends whom I met at the prayer-meeting at the French section of the Y. M. C. A., Tottenham Court Road, has been kind enough to send me 'Apostles of the Belgian Trenches.' I received it yesterday evening and finished reading it before going to the office this morning. It simply fascinated me. I have given it to my friend, who will forward it to our friends in Belfast, where it will be easy to arouse a great prayerful interest among the Protestants.

"Allow me here, dear Mr. and Mrs. Norton, to express my most heartfelt thanks for the splendid work you are doing among my countrymen. I also glory in the knowledge of my Saviour Jesus Christ.

"How can we ever repay the debt of gratitude that we Belgians owe you both and your countrymen? I know you seek no earthly treasure, you are aiming at a higher reward. From now on I shall remember you and your work in prayer.

"May the Lord bless you now in health and spiritual strength, so that the work undertaken may be pushed forward with all the vigor it deserves. And what can I do? My health is very much impaired through two operations. I am working until 6 or

6.30. On Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings I am engaged. Yet if I could by any means be of some utility to your work I should gladly do all I can.

“Yours very truly in Christ,
 “(Signed) O. VAN STEENBERGHE,
 “Adjutant in the Belgian Army.”

It is significant that it was in England in the home of a sister of Miss May B. White that the Adjutant found Christ as his Saviour, for Miss May White is with the Nortons, the pioneer worker of the Mission, as will be seen in the chapter on the work for women. This young officer became a working member of the Mission, a few months after the evangelists' arrival in Belgium.

Not long ago there fell into his hands a copy of “The Victorious Life,” written by the “Unknown Christian.” “If he were dictating this biography,” says Mrs. Norton, “he would wish to say only this of himself, ‘I have come to know the life that is Christ. The old Van Steenberghe was just, he was upright, but he was unbending; now it is no longer Van Steenberghe who lives, but Christ who lives in him.’ And we can testify to what the new Van Steenberghe is meaning in his contact with all about him.

“This man was at the beginning of the war an anarchistic socialist. His grandmother had lost her mind through the persecutions of the Roman Catholic church, directed against her husband, who had left the faith. She was refused confession, because

of this, and was not able to die in peace, thus being cut off from what she thought was her only access to God, and her life ended in darkness. These things with others had combined in giving Mr. Van Steenberghe a horror of this religion, which was all he knew, and he turned to Socialism and at last radical Socialism, as the solution of the sorrows of his own heart and the ills which affected his beloved land. He has told us how in the beginning of the war, seated in a cafe near Louvain, he heard an automatic piano across the way, grinding out the strains of the 'Internationale.' He wept as he heard it, and wrote to his wife, 'This must be the solution of all the ills of the world. We must lose ourselves in the greater social good.' This was the man who, when the Bible was put in his hands, found all these other beliefs to be but the shadow of the substance, and to-day he is fearlessly and joyously proclaiming a full salvation to his brothers, his '*camarades*' of old, who still sit in darkness."

Adjutant Van Steenberghe's wish expressed at the close of his letter was most wonderfully fulfilled, because to-day he is Mr. Norton's right hand man in the conduct of the property and business affairs of the Mission from the Brussels Center, and is also a teacher in the Bible schools, and a helper of all the missionaries.

In 1917 and 1918 the interest throughout the Belgian Army was at its height; the Nortons had been obliged to increase their staff in London to eight or

ten helpers, and they were receiving now about a thousand letters a week, most of them asking for spiritual help.

Meanwhile, nearly a year before, they had opened the Foyer, previously mentioned, in Paris, located at 48 Rue de Lille, under the direction of Pastor A. Blocher. In the spring of 1918 the Nortons visited the Paris Foyer and they also went to Le Havre, and Port Villez in France, taking Easter gifts to about twenty-two thousand mutilated and other soldiers who were incapacitated for service at the Front. All the gifts were given with direct reference to the Gospel.

The demand for Gospels and Testaments became so urgent that a special edition of two hundred thousand Gospels and fifty thousand New Testaments was printed in the two languages, French and Flemish, each Gospel and New Testament containing an outline clearly explaining how to become a Christian, and using only Scripture texts as the guide. By the close of 1918 practically every man in the Belgian Army had received either copies of the Scriptures or religious leaflets, and many of them both, for more than a quarter of a million Gospels and Testaments had been distributed in the Army. More than two hundred of the soldiers had undertaken to distribute Gospels and Testaments and tracts among their fellow-soldiers, and were seeking to lead their comrades to Christ.

It was impossible for the evangelists and their

friends not to recognize the hand of God in all this work as pointing forward to further labor among the Belgians. Through contact with the soldiers and by other means it had been made plain to the directors of the British and Allied Soldiers' Evangelistic Campaign that the spiritual need in Belgium was deep and far-reaching. Therefore, in the city of Philadelphia, in November, 1918, the Belgian Gospel Mission was founded, with Mr. and Mrs. Norton as its first Directors, and at the close of November the Directors left for Belgium.

CHAPTER V

THE BEGINNINGS IN BRUSSELS

"It was a dark day in December," wrote Mrs. Norton, "when a Belgian military limousine brought us to the threshold of the Hotel Astoria in Brussels. Throughout the hours of that short December day we had been traveling across a devastated territory, and through shell-swept dunes.

"As the darkness descended upon us, and our car topped the low hill overlooking the city, we saw in the distance the twinkling lights of the Belgian capital. We were coming unheralded, practically unknown,—and perhaps unwanted,—to the inhabitants of that great city. Just at that moment, as the car slowed up for the descent, we looked at each other, and the meaning of that act of faith swept over us with a new depth of realization. We said to each other, realizing somewhat of the problems that were before us, and humbled by the thought of the unseen multitudes awaiting the message, 'The Belgian Gospel Mission has arrived!' We were counting things that were to be as though they actually were at the present time.

"And Brussels itself, as we traversed its streets, seemed scarcely less bad than the poor desolate region of war wreck which we had left behind us. It was so short a time after signing the armistice, and as yet food had not arrived for the help of the

people in their semi-starvation,—and their clothing was but patches (albeit cleverly put together and bravely worn). Why had we come to this stricken land at the earliest possible moment, when only a military pass could gain us entrance? We had come at the bidding of the One who had sent us out on London's streets on a search for the soul of the Belgian soldier. And this entrance of ours into Belgium was but in obedience to the further call of the 'Master of our lives.' ”

It was thus only a few weeks after the departure of the German invaders that the Nortons received their commission to go to Belgium. In those first days of their residence in Brussels they had many a revelation of the results of the work in the Army. Their hotel rooms were daily thronged by visitors—soldiers with their families, pastors, and others, with their stories of war hardship. The Nortons then learned more than they had known before concerning the extent to which a people can suffer and still live through such awful days.

Little was known by these suffering Belgians of what had been going on in the outside world, and many of them had heard practically nothing of the work of evangelization among their own soldiers at the Front. When they heard of the work that had been done in the trenches they were urgent in their call to the missionaries to remain among them, and to work for the further evangelization of Belgium.

The Nortons soon learned that the conditions in the country were far too unsettled to undertake a

permanent Gospel work in any substantial way at that moment. However, they lost no time in undertaking what could be done, and a few months after their arrival Mrs. Norton began a Bible class for women in Brussels. Early in the summer of 1919 the class averaged from thirty-five to forty each week.

It was in the early months of the winter after the close of the war that the opportunity for ministration was specially open among the Christians who had suffered so severely. A committee of women in Philadelphia under the leadership of Mrs. Robert B. Haines, Jr., had been conducting the Department of Comforts during the war days, and they were still busily engaged in preparing and forwarding boxes of clothing. However, transportation was slow and difficult, and it was felt that while awaiting these gifts it would be needful to distribute as much relief as possible among the people in all parts of the country where the need was very great indeed. The Nortons accordingly asked leave of the government to buy from their army stores food for distribution among the civilian population. Consent was finally obtained, and even then the question of local transportation seriously interfered. A day of prayer was set aside by the evangelists on January 15 for intercession for the facilities that were so sorely needed. An hour in prayer had been spent by them, when they were summoned from their rooms to meet a Belgian officer—a colonel who had called to see them. During his visit he asked if there was any way in

which he might serve them. They told him of their need for transportation facilities for the food which they wished to distribute. "I am at this very moment on my way to the head of the Army Transport Department," said he, "and I will speak to him personally on your behalf."

In the afternoon, while the Nortons were again on their knees in prayer, there came a knock at the door. An officer from headquarters stood there. He had come to receive directions as to what motors would be required for their use! From that time on they had motor and chauffeurs placed at their disposal by the government for the purposes of relief.

They entrusted the local work of distribution to Protestant pastors in the especially needy parts of the country, such as the region in and around Mons, Charleroi, and Tournai. Numbers of centers were thus reached, and distribution was made among members of the National Church, the Belgian Missionary Church, Baptist, Plymouth Brethren, Reformed Dutch Church, and the Salvation Army. The distribution was confined to three articles of food, Quaker Oats, condensed milk, and chocolate. Some thirty thousand pounds of Quaker Oats, ten thousand tins of condensed milk, and twenty-one thousand pounds of chocolate were distributed, and thousands of Christians in Belgium were thus given help at a time when Christian sympathy was most needed.

When food was no longer so grievously needed, the boxes of clothing began to arrive from Amer-

ica, and these articles of clothing were then given to many a Belgian who had not known what it was to wear decent apparel for many months.

Mrs. Norton wrote at the time that "the Belgian people refused in many cases to accept the food we sent, without paying a little for it, although they needed it so sorely and could not procure it elsewhere. We love this spirit of theirs, and have permitted them to pay a tiny fraction of what the food was worth, but those who paid were allowed no more food than those who did not pay. We have received some four or five thousand francs in all from this voluntary act of the people, and with it my husband will purchase supplies of piece goods for making shirts and underclothing, which will be sent back to the different churches for distribution." This letter from a pastor at Tournai expresses the appreciation with which these services were received on every hand.

"During the last few days I have learned indirectly that you have made a tour of visits to the greater part of our Belgian Evangelical Churches. I regret very much that you did not visit our churches of Tournai and Rongy, of which I have the spiritual direction. Our churches have been sadly tried by the war. Our sister churches in Belgium have certainly not experienced all the sufferings of our two communities, which have always been in the region of war operations, and were subjected to a regime of oppression during the German

occupation, which stripped the families of our two churches.

“The families of our two religious communities were obliged to take refuge in the cellars for twenty-one days. Our religious edifices were hit by the shells. At Rongy a modest church had been erected in 1888 with the pennies of our brave and poor peasants, who made the greatest sacrifices for it; this church was damaged. In order to assemble in this house of prayer, our church council immediately repaired the damage by having the roof temporarily mended. We are afraid that a debt of 500 francs will weigh on the backs of our poor peasants, doubly ruined by this long war.

“These workmen, thanks to their work and their modest economies, had been able to purchase a cow. The Germans, before their departure, took away their cattle without any pity, and to-day, fifteen families of our church at Rongy cannot replace their cattle. Several families were obliged to leave their houses on account of the asphyxiating gas sent over during the bombardment, and when they returned to them, they found that the soldiers had taken away their modest provisions and even their clothes, so that now they are in the blackest misery.

“I recommend to you the suffering families of our two churches, comprising about two hundred souls, and also their Church Council, which is plunged in financial difficulties, but which walks by faith in its Saviour, persuaded above all that the Heavenly Father will never abandon his oppressed children.

The little gifts which we receive with gratitude for our suffering families will be intelligently divided, according to the needs of each family after due inquiries."

This appeal from the pastor of the Churches at Tournai and Rongy greatly touched the Directors of the Belgian Gospel Mission. A little later they were enabled to visit these two points, and minister personally to the pressing needs of the people. Mrs. Norton writes thus of the experience:

"We arrive [at Rongy] in a blinding snowstorm, and the Protestant Church is bitterly cold and draughty as the wind whistles through broken windows and ceiling during the service. This little church, paid for by no one can tell what sharp sacrifices of the peasant members, before the war was their pride and joy. Miraculously it was spared during those long days of bombardment, when bombs fell all about it, pitting churchyard and fields on every side, and when the poor peasant people, bereft of all, must hide for their very lives in their dark, unwholesome cellars, for weeks at a time.

"It escaped destruction but with some damage, the reparation of which would mean an outlay of 500 francs. But how could they provide that sum, \$100? It was quite impossible. Yet they borrowed 200 francs and commenced the work. When I heard this and looked into their care-worn faces, at their gnarled and knotted hands, rendered so by days and nights of unremitting toil, so much of it gone for nought by reason of the vandalism of the Germans,

who had taken their all, to the last cow, the last fowl, I craved the personal privilege of repairing their little church. A little mental calculating and I was able to announce at the little service that afternoon my intention. They met my offer gravely but gratefully, just as the previous day they had taken from our hands gifts of clothing and food. They have suffered too much and are yet too repressed to exhibit much joy,—rather they show their gratitude by tears. But to-day's mail brought a letter from their pastor. In the name of his church he thanks us and gives us as his special message this from the Word: 'He that doeth good is of God' (3 John 11).

"So back again to Brussels, our little trip completed. On a Monday recently, my husband being in England, I received a command to appear at the Royal Palace. The Queen received me alone and pinned something on my coat [the Order of Elizabeth], but better still accorded me a half hour's uninterrupted interview.

"Before I left Her Majesty's presence I said: 'Might I be permitted to relate to you a true story of how one soldier, who fell later at Pervyse, found faith in God?' As she graciously assented, I told her the story, which had come to me direct from the chaplain, whom I know, and to whom the soldier had related his experience.

"The soldier had received a Gospel at the Front. He read of God, but because he could not see Him he could not believe in his reality and in his omnipresence. But he longed to believe. One night at the

Yser, he was on sentry duty. Alone in the presence of danger, his thoughts turned again to God. If only he could believe.

“As he thought, he was aware of some one behind him. He knew some one was standing there, yet did not dare to turn his head to see. At last, ever so little, he did turn his head, and he saw *his King!* Yes, it was his King!—standing sentry duty with him—sharing in the every experience of his soldiers. For two hours behind him, motionless, stood his monarch, and in that interval, as he thought and prayed, came faith, faith in God through Christ. The presence of his King, silent yet so near, the marvel of the whole experience, had brought to him faith in the presence and personality of God.

“There were tears in the eyes of the Queen when I had finished. ‘I shall tell it to the King,’ she said softly.

“Out again into the clear sunshine of the spring day, and a little later, my steps turned to a different quarter of the city, where were poor houses and humble folk, but what joy, for in Palace or hovel it is *with Him.*”

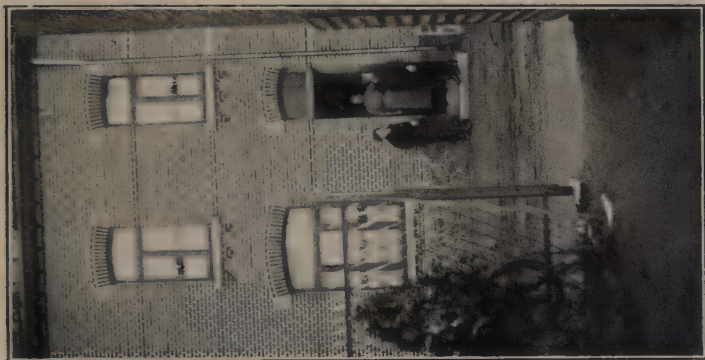
The work that was begun in the Hotel Astoria could not be confined to a temporary center of hotel accommodation. Day after day the Nortons were busy walking about the streets of Brussels searching for a building where the Mission might establish a center for its outreaching work. In April, 1919, a building was found at 17 Rue du Gouvernement Provisoire, in an excellent location close to the

heart of the city, and on a quiet street just between two of the principal arteries of travel. There the Mission opened its hall and offices, and in this building the evangelists took up their residence.

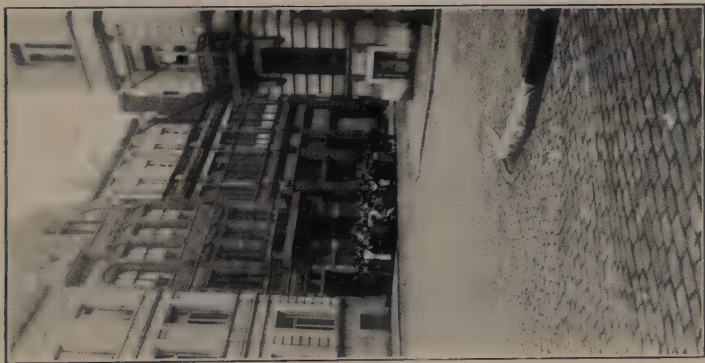
"It would be hard," wrote Mrs. Norton, "to describe faithfully the loneliness that one feels when one comes to a perfectly strange land, as we two came last December to start an absolutely new work, and yet those early days will form some of the precious memories of all our lives: the very nearness of God, our absolute dependence upon him, the accepting by faith the things that were to be when as yet there were none of them, and under his guiding hand seeing these things accepted by faith beginning to come to pass. Now here in our quarters, our own big house, we have at the rear, across a little cobbled courtyard, a roomy stone garage and stable, in one part of which our skillful concierge has constructed shelf after shelf to hold Gospels and Testaments, Bibles and tracts, which form our chief stock in trade; and in the other large room which was formerly used for the garage we keep our stores of food and clothing."

In this Mission Center in Brussels the first public Sunday service on the last Sunday of June, 1919, was significant not only because of the events of that meeting, but because of what it would yet mean for Belgium. A few cards of invitation were issued, and about a hundred letters were sent to individuals telling them of the forthcoming meeting. These letters went to persons of all classes, to trades-people

AT HASSELT



THE BRUSSELS HEADQUARTERS



AT WARQUIGNIES



who had served the Mission, to painters, electricians, and mechanics who had helped in the preparation of the Mission house for its present uses, and to some military friends.

The chairs ordered for the Mission had not yet arrived, but borrowed chairs were used. Alfred, the concierge, brought a vase of roses to put on the organ in the meeting room. "For my son," he said—his son who had been dead several years, and who on his death-bed had asked for a Bible which no one could give him. Alfred and his wife Ursule do not lack Bibles now.

Song slips were printed for distribution, and when the service actually commenced every seat in the little hall was filled, and some who were inside the room could not find seats, but remained standing. After the message by Chaplain Karl Blommaert, one of the few Protestant chaplains in the Belgian Army, and who had been a great help to the Nortons during the war, Mr. Norton spoke, and Miss May B. White translated for him.

When the invitation to accept Christ was given, about sixty out of the hundred persons present lifted their hands. The leaders could hardly believe their eyes, and they were afraid that the people did not understand what they were doing. The question was put again, and the real meaning of the decision fully described. Again the hands were lifted as before, apparently. When decision cards were passed, forty-one were returned. One of the striking incidents of this meeting was the signing of a

card by Madame De Wallens, the mother of Pierre De Wallens, who it will be remembered was the first Belgian soldier given a Gospel and led to Christ in London by the Nortons.

Some had come long distances to attend the service. Among them were a soldier, his wife and little baby from Antwerp, twenty-five miles away, as well as four persons from Malines, about thirteen miles from Brussels.

"Then," writes Mrs. Norton, "later on up in our room Ursule came to us. 'Did you find my card and Alfred's among the number?' she said. 'Oh, Madame,' and the tears flowed fast, 'I want you to know that it was with all my heart that I have made this decision. I have only one regret, and that is that I did not do it sooner, but I never had any one to help me.' There it is: that is our text for the future."

A close study of the Belgian field persuaded the directors, with the advice of a number of consecrated Belgian Christians, that the Mission center should mark the beginning of a growing ministry in certain definite forms. It was soon perceived that one of the great needs was the training of workers who could go out into city and country well-equipped for Bible teaching; for personal conversation with those who knew little or nothing of the Gospel; for open-air Gospel preaching, and the holding of meetings in such halls or homes as might be available.

It was also seen that the work of colportage, the constant and wide-spread distribution of tracts, Gos-

pels, and Testaments, and, where possible, copies of the whole Bible, was greatly needed, and would prove to be one of the most available and fruitful means of evangelization.

No one could be in Belgium very long without being deeply touched by the needs of the children. There are crowds of children everywhere, and, of course, since the war many of them are orphans. Besides this, the women need a very personal ministry, and the Mission was led to believe that a special work among the women should be undertaken.

The fact that two languages are spoken in Belgium requires adjustment to local needs. There must be Flemish-speaking workers, and also a similar staff of French-speaking workers. Therefore, a dual work was planned, both in the Mission Center, and in out-stations in accordance with the local language. A Bible Institute, or Training School, modeled somewhat after well-known Bible institutes in America, was believed to be the key to the training situation, and was undertaken for French and Flemish speaking students.

A study of the field also revealed the wisdom of opening small meeting halls in as many of the lesser towns as possible. This plan, in view of the scarcity of Protestant preaching stations throughout Belgium, deserves the closest possible attention, and all the support that can be given to it. An entrance to many towns was obtained by means of large tents, two of which were secured by the Mission, one hold-

ing an audience of about five hundred, and the other about three hundred and fifty. These tents have been used in the spring and summer and early autumn for Gospel meetings both for children and for grown folks, each tent reaching about four towns during the summer. In Belgium as in America, tent work of this type has proved itself to be a soul-winning and church-building pioneering enterprise, for in a number of places where the tents have been used urgent requests have come from converts to establish a permanent work. In several towns this has already taken the form of a local assembly, meeting in a small hall or building, either rented, purchased or built by the Mission.

How the hand of God has led in the steady development of these and other branches of work emanating from the Mission center in the few years since the great war, will be unfolded in other chapters of the story. The development may well furnish a document for the study of all who are interested in missions in distinctively Roman Catholic countries. There is probably no mission field where the exact conditions are so little understood by those in the homeland as the fields where the Roman Catholic Church is practically preoccupying the life of the people, and particularly in Europe. One cannot safely judge of the results of the decades or centuries of such preoccupation by observing the results in countries where the Roman Catholic Church is not really dominant in the religious life of the people. If one would think deeply enough into the

corollaries of the situation where the Gospel is withheld from the people so far as Bible reading is concerned, one would be able by so much the better to picture the resulting position in a land like Belgium. There is no spiritual freedom where there is not free access to the printed Word of God, and the eager surprise and spiritual hunger with which the pure Gospel is heard in Belgium, and in other lands similar to it, is only one sign of the fact that here is a message that the people simply have not heard. One might perhaps dismiss from consideration the many other strong reasons for Protestant missions in Roman Catholic countries if this one reason is permitted to remain. And it does remain, so long as the Roman Catholic Church is dominant in any land.

CHAPTER VI

WHY BELGIUM?

Enough has been written in the preceding pages to show that in the lives of thousands of Belgians there has been no light of the Gospel. Any harmful consequences may follow from the withholding of God's revealed Word. In Belgium, notwithstanding its highly developed civilization, its energy, its courage, its beautiful cities, and well cultivated fields, the Gospel has been so long withheld from the people that there is a general spiritual illiteracy.

Nevertheless, even under such circumstances, and perhaps largely because of them, there is a heart-hunger on the part of the people. One who travels through Belgium with the religious conditions of the people in mind, and with a goodly supply of Testaments, Gospels, or religious tracts will remember particularly the outstretched hands everywhere. Curiosity may be the impelling motive, and doubtless is in most cases, but it is not idle curiosity that causes so many who read the Gospels to write to the Mission workers, or to seek them out afterward, or to attend the meetings in order that they may hear more of that which they have found as a new treasure.

On a certain Sunday we visited the Church of the Black Virgin at Hal, where behind the altar rail is a statue of the Virgin Mary beautifully clothed with

gorgeous garments, and having a black face. The tradition runs that centuries ago during a siege of the town the figure of the Virgin came to life, and with her own hands caught the cannon balls, and saved the town, while her face was blackened by the burning powder. On this account she is worshipped in the church at Hal, and in an alcove not far from the main entrance of the church behind an iron screen a pile of cannon balls is shown to strengthen the tradition.

Outside the church on the day of our visit a crowd had gathered in the street, and many were passing along the side of the church close to a tiled canopy under which sat a figure of the Lord Jesus. The people were reverently and quietly moving down one side of the narrow street and coming back along the pavement close to the church; and one could see every second or two a hand reach up among the crowd and touch the knees of the figure of Christ. These hands were outstretched in the hope that the touch would bring healing.

On another occasion, when we were passing through the little town of Ninove, we halted for a moment at the shop of the town apothecary, M. Van der Smissen, whose family, we were told, was the only Protestant family in the town. He came out from his shop, and soon assembled his household on the pavement to greet us. Then from all directions the crowd gathered, men, women and children, leaving their work or their play to stand close to the automobile as we talked with the apothecary.

This was his story, which he wrote out for us later, expressing as he did so the hope "that it may be used to glorify the name of our Lord, who in his grace looked down upon us poor sinners, plunged in utter darkness such as you find in Flanders." He belonged to an old and distinguished Roman Catholic family. In course of time, he said, "because of the rapacity of the Roman Catholic priests, my parents lost their blind confidence in the Roman Catholic Church, and decided to read the Gospel, in order to get a sure foundation for their religious beliefs. This was the reason why I heard so often references to the Scripture stories, while I was yet a child, and which left a deep impression upon my soul."

While in Brussels learning a trade, young Van der Smissen met a colporteur, Brother Verlyen, of Maria Hoorebeke, asked him for a Bible, no full copy of which the evangelist had at the moment, but received a Testament on a later visit from the faithful colporteur. After reading a little some days later the young man said to himself, "If Jesus Christ were still on earth, surely I would want to follow him!" He went on with his reading, and friends began to scoff at him, warning him that he would land in the mad-house!

The priest took away the New Testament, saying that it was a heretical book. But the seed had been sown, and it grew, during the temptations of regular army service, of the seventies, for the apothecary is no longer a young man; and God sent to him

reminders at the hand of other colporteurs in the army days of long ago, and even when he was on guard at the King's palace in Brussels.

He was established as an apothecary in Ninove in 1880. And there, through the influence of a faithful and persistent Protestant young man, he had this experience:—

“He showed me Christ,” writes the apothecary, “as the only way of salvation, but what was most difficult for me to grasp was ‘salvation without works.’ Therefore I left him for a while, but searched the Scriptures all the time and read the Church History of Fleuri. The persecutions of J. Heer and Willemus of Prague very much disgusted me, and I could not approve of these decisions on the part of the Church. Also this Protestant did not abandon me. How often did he wait about for me to remind me of the blessed story of salvation when I least expected to see him! He constantly pointed out to me what a responsibility I had toward God, but I took no decisive step, only continued to search the Scriptures. I read many books by Bros. Darby, Voorhoeve, Lemkes, etc., which threw light on my path, but he alone can understand what it means to be a slave to Roman Catholic formalities and customs, who has passed through a similar struggle. There were days when I hid my Bible under bales of flour and sugar bags at the top of the house in order to find rest for my soul, but of course I found no rest. I could not miss the Word of God any more and was compelled to fetch it

again. One night I awoke and heard these words in my ears: 'The Roman Catholic Church is as a withered flower, and the Lord alone is her Head and Judge.' These words struck me so that I perspired, and the following morning I wrote these words in my Bible, not understanding their meaning. However, later I learned to understand them through a book written by Mr. Darby. The Roman Catholic church is responsible as a church, but Christ is the head and Lord of these ignorant and poor believers, who follow blindly their leaders, knowing no better."

Then through the deep waters of a marriage engagement, broken because of the young man's growing and rapidly clarifying convictions as to the Truth, which his fiancee did not share, he was led out onto solid ground.

"My brothers had in the meantime been studying the Bible (without my knowledge), and very shortly afterwards they were converted. Now I felt greatly encouraged and strengthened, and realized that I stood no longer alone to fight the battle. My parents were very sad about this, and my father determined not to allow this thing to stand, went to the Head Priest of the town urging him to take the matter up with me, and to bring me back to my earlier beliefs. He came, but it was easy to refute all his arguments, for I had the precious Word of God with me. He left me determined never to speak about the matter again, but strangely enough he told my father: 'You'll be like your son one of these days.'

“Not many months passed before the whole thing was known in our town, and very heavy persecution followed. Customers ceased to come. In the villages round about us they shut their doors to our faces when we went by, and my parents, suffering under this opposition, accused me of ruining them financially. But the Lord provided a wonderful way out of the difficulty. We continued to witness of the new life we had found, and in our home we had continued discussions. At last, father saw that he was utterly unable to convince us, and decided to read the Bible for himself. He took the Book with him in his room, and kneeling down he asked the Lord to show him the truth. He got up and opened the Scriptures at Galatians 1:8, ‘Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.’ He stood there as unconscious, staring at those words, and with the open Bible in his hand; he came down to the sitting room saying: ‘Read, my son, what the Lord gave me as answer to my prayer; if I should continue to oppose you now, I would be accursed.’ He shook hands with us saying ‘We are one henceforth, we will fight the good fight together, that His name may be glorified.’

“I could not contain my joy, and running to the workshop of my brother I cried out, ‘Come and see, father is converted.’

“There surely was joy in our midst that day. We were all happy except mother, who said we had all gone mad. However, she was an upright soul, and

not long afterwards she, too, had been won by the love of her Saviour. Then we all united in one song of deliverance and praise. Through our witnessing and preaching of the Word several others in our family were converted, every one of whom had his share of difficulty and opposition. Two of these have now gone Home. Wherever we went we tried to bring the Word of God, and we have continued this work now during some thirty-eight years, in spite of the Roman Catholic opposition. I lost my wife after three and a half years, and was left with two children. I married again (this time a sister from Holland), and have had eleven children since, two of whom have died, but all my other children are converted. Surely I have reason to praise God that He has given the privilege of having believing children, who will be able to continue the work when I shall be called up."

One can never forget the hands that were stretched up around the sides of the car from that eager crowd of smiling and friendly people in front of M. Van der Smissen's shop, in order to receive the Gospels that we were handing out to as many as we could reach. It was a joy to give the little books into those eagerly outstretched hands; and so it is wherever one goes in Belgium. Superstition may have laid its hold, as indeed it has, upon many a heart, and hands are upreached in the vain hope that some blessing may result from the touch on the knee of figures in stone; but it is also true that these same hearts are by no means unreachable

with the message of the Gospel which is received by so many with gladness, as the little books are placed in the outstretched hands. They are not to be disappointed by the Word itself when once it has been taken into the life. All this finds vivid illustration in a celebration in Bruges, described as follows by a newspaper correspondent, and during which the mission workers had experiences that throw light upon the opportunities awaiting them.

“At an early hour on Monday morning,” writes the correspondent, “the bells of Bruges clanged their sonorous peals with an insistence and a depth that fitly announced what is to the citizens the great event of the year—the procession of the precious Blood. So may they have clanged when the Germans came in 1914, and again with even greater force when, in 1918, they left the fair domains which they had fondly thought to make their own. But today all is rejoicing, and the old ceremony is celebrated with all its old magnificence, enhanced by the splendid weather which has burst upon us during the last few days.

“Great indeed and striking have been the vicissitudes of the city in the centuries that have rolled since Theodoric of Flanders brought back from the Crusades the Sacred Vial which held the water in which Joseph of Arimathea washed the blood-stained body of Christ. He received it as a reward of his services in the Second Crusade from the hands of his brother-in-law, Baldwin, King of Jerusalem. As he took it from his hand, he is reported

to have said: 'Not for a rough soldier like myself is the custody of so sacred a relic,' and at once placed it round the neck of his chaplain, Leo of St. Omer, who brought it back to Bruges, where it was placed in the old Chapel of St. Basile, where it still remains, the burghers' best-prized treasure. It too, like the city, has had its ups and downs of fate. Once when it was being carried in procession, even as it has been now, the cry rose, 'The Ghenters are on us,' and in the turmoil that succeeded the treasure disappeared. Three days later one of the nuns of the Beguinage saw something shining at the bottom of the stream, and lo! it was the reliquary of the Holy Blood. Again, when later the Calvinists were in possession of the town, it was by the forethought of a private citizen that it was preserved. Again, in the troubled days of the Revolution from 1733 to 1819, it was carefully hidden away and the annual procession discontinued which had gone on ever since 1303.

"Again it was suspended during the German occupation, but has now been resumed with all its old seriousness of religious purpose, and is welcomed by admiring crowds of people as it passes through the streets. The long and eventful drama of the world's history is unrolled before them from the very earliest days down to the coming of Christ himself; and last in the long procession comes the sacred relic which has for so many centuries been the treasured possession of the town of Bruges. Long may it remain so, and long may the sacred

truths to which the procession points in its various details be the rallying cry of the Belgian people."

Writing of the missionaries' experiences on this occasion, Mrs. Norton says:

"Weeks before the fête day, we began to get ready for the part we were to play. Every one connected with the Mission desired to assist, so that we found we should be numbering about fifty persons. Special trains were to be run all that day from Brussels to Bruges, so it was not difficult to reserve for our own use a complete third-class carriage. Every week we had a rehearsal of Flemish hymns, and one or two of the more experienced leaders in this sort of work, men who had been going to Bruges for many years on this occasion, spoke to the members of our Mission, telling them how they must conduct themselves, and helped to plan the activities of the day. Many thousands of printed one-page tracts and Gospels were prepared for free distribution, and they were conveyed to Bruges before the great day, also we took with us a large stock of Testaments and Bibles; these latter to be sold.

"Bruges was indeed *en fête* when we arrived, and on our way up to our Bruges headquarters we commenced to distribute some of our booklets and were encouraged by the way they were received. At the house we replenished our supplies of booklets and Gospels, and groups were detailed for the work of distribution in different parts of the city, for we were to occupy the forenoon in colportage, and to have our open-air meetings in the afternoon. When

we gathered together at noon for a simple lunch, there was but one testimony, and that was to the willingness with which people had received the Gospels and tracts. Rarely were they refused or thrown down. Rather the witness was universal that in most cases the little leaflets were carefully folded up and put away in the pocket to be read when there was more leisure, and not so much to be seen.

“How we longed to speak to all of them personally, to tell them of our love for them, and of the better love of the living Saviour, for it was a pitiful, dead object they had come to Bruges to see carried in procession through its narrow, winding streets. I cannot express quite how dreadful this procession seemed. I know not which seemed sadder and more terrible, the papier-mache representations of the dead Christ, dripping painted blood, or the gaudy representation of saints and Virgin *always living*, and vivid, always borne aloft in splendor above the poor dead Christ. No wonder that at my side I heard ribald laughs, and onlookers saying, ‘Poor Jesus, he is not given a very good place to-day.’ It seems very horrible to set this down in black and white, but to many of these people our powerful and risen Lord is but a painted idol, a little less powerful than his companion idols. And when ‘the holy blood’ itself, borne aloft in a gilded casket, passed by, I had to strain my gaze to see any one bowing in adoration, where before, we had been told, thousands fell as one man before it as it passed.

“We could not be oblivious of the change of temper on the part of the people, their incredulity was so openly expressed, and we saw afresh why we and others had been sent to this land to tell them the truth about our Lord Jesus Christ. I like to forget, and to pass as quickly as possible from, this procession, in which we all remarked there was no resurrection; and what joy to find ourselves at last together, opposite the Chapel of the Holy Blood in the open spaces under the trees, beginning at last our open air messages. We found others there before us, street fakirs, street musicians, magicians, the sort of folk that follow from place to place these occasions of festivity, but we saw their crowds melting away, and coming over to us at the sound of our little organ and of our uplifted voices, and all through that bright afternoon and until the shadows fell, we kept at our station. A part of the time we had four meetings going on, and at last we were left masters of the field, molested neither by police nor people. Indeed, they not only did not molest us, but they drew up just as near as they could around us, looking up into our faces so hungrily, accepting the leaflets, buying Testaments and Bibles, and hymn sheets.

“One after another of our number took turns in addressing the crowds, and they never seemed weary. Those of us who were not actually taking part in the meetings were busy in the outskirts, distributing literature and seeking any anxious one. Toward the close of the day my husband and I sat

down on a bench to rest a little. We heard a voice behind us, and turned to see a well-dressed man standing by. He started speaking to us in Flemish, and then when I replied in French he turned at once to that language. I will tell you word for word what he said to me:

“*Monsieur et Madame*, I heard one of your number speak a little bit ago, and he showed a joy in his life which I would give much to possess. It has been years since I left the Catholic Church, and to-day I believe nothing; in short, I have been a revolutionary Socialist, but I would give worlds to get what that man has, for I am not satisfied, and I would become a Protestant. Can you tell me how to obtain it?”

“I spoke to him for a bit, then called one of our men workers, who had a very satisfactory conversation with him, and then at last we called Mr. Mietes, the head of our work in Bruges. Afterwards Mr. Mietes told us that he said, ‘To-day I have had my first taste of peace, but it is not enough; I must have all there is to have.’”

“We were hastening away to supper before catching our train when we saw a group of our students gathered around an unusually intelligent looking man, and one of the workers was in conversation with him. This splendid man, a school-teacher, was saying practically what the other man, whom we had just left, had said to us!

“‘I have been a Catholic, but I am nearer to a

Bolshevist now. I am not happy, not satisfied, and if you can convert me, I shall be happy.'

"Not so far on the way toward the knowledge of Christ as the other man, and yet just as hungry, and ready to be helped. In a group gathered around my husband, who was speaking through an interpreter, there was one woman who raised her hand for prayer, and there were many who permitted us to speak to them, and not only raised no objection, but manifested a most eager interest. One of our co-laborers amused us all by telling us what he overheard one Flemish woman saying, upon having a leaflet handed to her. 'Oh, dear! Oh, dear! This *Evangelisatie-werk in Belgie* (Belgian Gospel Mission) is just everywhere. I cannot get away from it anywhere in Bruges.'

"That was exactly what God had sent us there to do, and by his grace our mission was carried to a successful conclusion, for before night the whole city was plastered with the Gospel. About sixty thousand Scripture portions and tracts were distributed, and as we walked to the station that night we could not but observe that the city streets were not littered with these, but we knew they were carried safely home in the pockets of the possessors.

"We had one or two rather interesting and amusing anecdotes to relate going back in the train. Miss White told how in the tram she overheard a little girl say to her brother, 'Janneke, have you got your booklet?' and the little boy produced a Gospel as proof. The mother just at that juncture took from

the little boy his precious possession, not to destroy, but to wipe it off very carefully, and put it in her own pocket for security's sake.

"Then there was the tiny boy that I encountered near to the market-place on the memorable day, and to whom I gave a Gospel. He was such an open-faced, bright little fellow, and he had on a very peculiar green coat, home-made as to manufacture, so that I had no difficulty in recognizing him some hours later, in another part of the city, among all the crowds, and he knew me, and although he could not speak to me, for he was Flemish, he came up and produced from his trousers pocket a gingerbread man. This he presented to me as a token of affection and gratitude. I treasured that gingerbread man all the afternoon, and when later on I saw the boy again I gave him a whole New Testament, and I am praying for the little fellow, that he may become God's man through reading His own blessed Word.

"We were all tired as we boarded the train at half-past nine o'clock, but all the same our twenty-five Bible Institute students could not be restrained, out of the fullness of joy of their heart, from singing all the way back to Brussels. A rival concert was started on the other side of the carriage by some drunken sailors, but we persevered, and won out before reaching Brussels. It was a glorious, happy day. We stormed the stronghold of entrenched superstition that day, and by faith we are looking forward to a great and blessed harvest."

It is to the city of Bruges, with its great needs,

that the Rev. Walter Teeuwissen, pastor of a church in Spring Lake, Michigan, has recently gone with his family, to be the mission pastor there, and to have special care of the stations in Flanders.

The contrasts in Belgium are impressive. There is a little country community called Maria Hoorebeke, which is the one Protestant community that survived the days of the Inquisition. A farm-house is still standing and occupied which furnished a cellar meeting place for the Protestants of the sixteenth century during the days when the Duke of Alva's men were hunting down rich and poor alike. One stands in the little cellar with humble heart as one recalls how God has ever in times of persecution preserved a remnant of the people who should bear testimony to His name.

The pastor of this flock in the days of the Inquisition lived in the woods near by, or wherever he could find a hiding-place. It was not thought safe, even in later days of the Austrian domination, to build a church near the highroad itself, nor to erect one with a spire, so in a somewhat secluded place the church was erected, and now forms the center for a Protestant group, where at the time of our visit a missionary conference was in progress lasting all day, and attended by representatives of churches from all directions, and by missionaries from foreign lands.

In the church itself one sees over the pulpit a text that is characteristic of the spirit still standing fast in the heart of Belgian Protestantism, and indicat-

ing the experience through which the people have passed, and in many respects are still passing. It is in Flemish, which is the language of the region of Maria Hoorebeke;—“*Vrees niet gy klein Kuddeke,*” “Fear not, little flock.”

Belgium has a population of about seven and a half to eight millions, and among these there are possibly fifty thousand Protestants. The religious statistics are not accurately obtainable, but from forty thousand to fifty thousand is the figure commonly accepted. It is also said that there are in Belgium as many monks and nuns as there are Protestants. One may find as many as fifty convents in a single city. In one province, West Flanders, it is reported that there are some sixteen hundred villages and towns, and among these twenty-four Protestant preaching stations. A very few facts such as these are sufficient to indicate the conditions that largely control the life of the people.

There are two leading church bodies that are more widely known than others in Belgium,—the Union des Églises Evangéliques Protestantes and the Église Chrétienne Missionnaire Belge.

The principal organized effort before the Belgian Gospel Mission began its work was supplied by the stations and the efforts of these two main groups, although the Plymouth Brethren and the Baptists have long maintained a work in Belgium. The Rev. François Busé, representing the first group, reports that there are about fifty congregations of Protestants in Belgium and fifty ministers, but only



THE OLD FARM HOUSE AT MARIA HOOREBEKE
(See p. 87)

YPRES IN 1922

A GLIMPSE OF ANCIENT BRUGES

fifteen of whom are of Belgian nationality, the others having come from France, Switzerland, and Holland. It will readily be seen that with so small a number of Protestants in a population of perhaps eight million the possibilities of wide evangelism are greatly limited, if no other active agencies were used, and particularly now since there has been such an undermining of so many of the churches by Modernism, so that the teaching of the pure Gospel is much impaired. In some congregations there is a sharp reaction from this tendency on the part of those who accept the Bible as the infallible Word of God, and not simply as "containing the word of God."

In conversation with a pastor, I was assured that the Belgians are more accessible to the Gospel than are the French, and that there is a certain respect for Protestants which is a help to the work. However, there is much antagonism on the part of the priests, and by word of mouth and in print an effort is strongly made to put persons on their guard against the Protestant meeting places, and against the reading of the Gospels or Bible.

In such a congregation as that affiliated with the Belgian Gospel Mission in Brussels there are always many new-comers, yet the permanent interest of the people is shown by the fact that perhaps three-fourths of those who attend the meetings come quite regularly. Ordinarily the Belgian is not thoroughly trained in giving, because the Roman Church has furnished a training not so much in the direction of

giving as in the direction of purchasing certain advantages and benefits. Hence it is that this phase of the Christian life develops somewhat slowly, and is not unduly urged upon the Belgian Protestants who have recently come into the Evangelical Churches, because it is thought that the grace of giving is one that should be permitted to develop under the touch of the new life. A large share of the support of the Belgian Protestant Churches comes from England, Scotland and America. One young man whose child was recently baptized has openly said that now he has a duty to give to the church; and at least one congregation under the care of the Mission is self-supporting, apart from the pastor's salary, while others are gradually learning to give. Many of the Belgians are not well informed concerning the place of stewardship in the Christian life; but on the other hand, several influential Belgians have given generously in large amounts, aggregating thousands of dollars, greatly to the strengthening of the Mission.

And not only in material support, but because of invaluable help in other ways, the Mission has had reason to be grateful for the counsel and encouragement of the chairman of the Mission Council in Brussels, M. Georges Collinet, a man of large business interests, wide knowledge of Belgian conditions, and earnest devotion to the spread of the Gospel in his own land, a work to which he so freely gives of time and means in co-operation with the Directors and the staff.

Many yet believe that what is meant by conversion is little more than changing one's religion from the Roman Catholic faith to the Protestant. There are those who have been for a year or two under Protestant preaching who do not even yet understand what is meant by true conversion and the new birth, so thoroughly have they been confused by the teachings under which they have lived for so many years.

One of the greatest difficulties the Protestant missionary has in Belgium is to arouse a consciousness of sin. The end of a religious procession may easily be a drink in a café. The path from the church to the café is short, and evidently attractive. One of the worst resorts in Brussels is named for the Saviour, "Saint Sauveur." Everywhere one is impressed with this mixture of a formal religion of works and the accepted practices in which so many of the people freely indulge, with apparently no thought of the sinfulness involved in these practices. A responsible Christian leader, not an American, told of a man in one of the Belgian towns who asked for a rise in wages. The employer simply answered, "What's the need,—you have a beautiful wife!"

A Belgian business man who travels throughout the country, and who is a Protestant Christian, assured me that there was much religious interest during the War, but since then in very many places religious meetings are in the hands of those who are not true to the Bible. He has found in his experience that the smaller churches are likely to be more

true. He finds everywhere a materialism which makes Christian work difficult, but tremendously needed.

Another Christian man who has lived in Belgium for some thirty years believes that in these days special work for the children is most important. It is to his mind in that direction that the hope of Belgium really lies. He assured me that he has never met a Roman Catholic who could say that he had absolute assurance of salvation. Another business man informed me that he has met one family who says that they do have that assurance. On every hand I found testimony to the effect that there are real Christians to be found in the Catholic Church, but the superstition, formalism, and idolatry apparent in all directions create an atmosphere in which it is difficult for true Christian belief to flourish.

One experienced man expressed the conviction that the small Gospel meeting is the best type of meeting by which to reach the people, and it was his conviction that small meetings should be greatly multiplied. He also mentioned to me another development not altogether understood even by those who live in Belgium. Since the War, buildings that might be used for religious meetings have been taken up by moving picture shows and by garages, so that it is difficult to find appropriate places for religious meetings. He feels that the common life in Belgium is hard, and that what is greatly needed among those who would work for and with the Belgians is more real love for them, so that the Gospel

may not only be preached, but shown forth in life. The less thoughtful Belgian is somewhat suspicious of the motives of others, and is likely to be wondering what it is you are getting out of your efforts. It is difficult under the training to which the country has been subjected for centuries for many a Belgian to realize that religious motives may be truly altruistic.

I was informed that the upper classes have been almost untouched by Gospel efforts, for the power of the Roman Church there is distinctly dominant. When I inquired how this power might be exercised to influence the people in ordinary life, my attention was called to simply one factor as illustrating many phases that might have been mentioned. The railways are mostly state railways. If then the railways are largely under the control of Roman Catholic leadership, the question arises, how can a man not a Roman Catholic expect promotion? Indeed, any one who withdraws from the Roman Catholic church may expect to be ostracised. I was told, for example, that a family from Antwerp moved into another town, and the local provision store would not supply them when it was learned that they were Protestants.

During the days of the Reformation, the roots of Protestantism struck deep into the soil of Belgium, but later in the days of the Inquisition under the ruthless hand of Alva these roots were almost killed. Some three hundred thousand persons fled to Holland and thousands of others to England. But as

Mr. Norton wrote, after nearly two years in Belgium itself:

“One has only to recall the past history of Belgium to know what devotion the Belgian people show to the Gospel when they know it as their own,—both the lower classes and the higher classes. Motley says in his ‘Dutch Republic’: ‘The Netherland revolt was not an aristocratic, but a popular, although certainly not democratic movement. It was a great episode—the longest, the darkest, the bloodiest, the most important episode in the history of the religious reformation in Europe. The nobles, so conspicuous upon the surface at the outbreak, only drifted before a storm which they neither caused nor controlled.’

“Well could Motley say this of the mighty movement in Flanders, when Charles V and Philip II, who by the way, were both born in Belgium, drenched that land with human blood, so that tens of thousands of Christians were martyred for the Christian faith, and twenty thousand people left the city of Tournay singing the songs of the church, conscious of the fact that such action most probably meant death. Every torture known to the Spanish Inquisition was used in Belgium. Of the men, every so-called heretic was to be hanged, and every woman buried alive, but these were some of the mildest forms of torture. People were burned, skinned alive, and suffered every torture that man could conceive. Listen to Motley:

“‘In the next year, Titelmann caused one Robert

Ogier, of Ryssel, in Flanders, to be arrested, together with his wife and two sons. Their crime consisted in not going to mass, and practising private worship at home. They confessed the offense, for they protested that they could not endure to see the profanation of their Saviour's name in the idolatrous sacraments. They were asked what rites they practised in their own house. One of the sons, a mere boy, answered, "We fall on our knees, and pray to God that he may enlighten our hearts, and forgive our sins. We pray for our sovereign, that his reign may be prosperous, and his life peaceful. We also pray for the magistrates and others in authority, that God may protect and preserve them all." The boy's simple eloquence drew tears even from the eyes of some of his judges; for the inquisitor had placed the case before the civil tribunal. The father and the eldest son were, however, condemned to the flames. "O God!" prayed the youth at the stake, "Eternal Father, accept the sacrifice of our lives, in the name of thy beloved Son." "Thou liest, scoundrel!" fiercely interrupted a monk, who was lighting the fire; "God is not your father; ye are the devil's children." As the flames rose about them, the boy cried out once more, "Look, my father, all heaven is opening, and I see ten hundred thousand angels rejoicing over us. Let us be glad, for we are dying for the truth." "Thou liest! thou liest!" again screamed the monk; "all hell is opening, and you see ten hundred thousand devils thrusting you into eternal fire."

Eight days afterwards, the wife of Ogier and his other son were burned.'

"Such is the loyalty of the Belgian when he knows God!

"Belgium has been, and is, crying out for the Gospel, and men to-day are willing, if they know the truth, to show an equal devotion to it. The centurion so often has been ready for the truth, but how often it has been so difficult to get Peter ready to carry the message. I truly believe if the ear of the Church of God had been open to the voice of God, and a hundred men filled with the Spirit and acquainted with the French and Flemish languages had been ready upon the beginning of the armistice to push forward into Belgium with the Evangel, that Belgium would to-day be rocking with the power of God and untold thousands of people would be accepting Christ."

It was at the time of the persecutions in the Netherlands that the heroic Covenanters of Scotland marched to the scaffold, rather than deny the faith. In speaking before Dr. Scroggie's Church in Edinburgh some months ago, Mrs. Norton said:

"As I stand here tonight I remember the heroic stand of the Covenanters. I recall that I visited the cemetery where they tell me there lie 1500 of those brave souls who gave their lives a glad sacrifice for the truth. They fought a winning fight, and Scotland was gained for the Gospel. But across the Channel, three hours away, another band, just as heroic, fought even a fiercer fight and just as



STATIONS OF THE
Belgian Gospel Mission
 1924

bravely died, and they lost their fight and went down in defeat. And the conquerors in Scotland forgot the vanquished in Belgium and there she has lain in darkness until this day. What think you are God's thoughts of your neglect of Belgium, so near to you, enslaved by the darkness of ignorance of the truth you so loved and have so jealously guarded throughout the centuries?"

When Belgium became independent, King Leopold I, a Prince of a Protestant Bavarian family, refused to become a Catholic as the Constitution required, but permitted his children to be brought up in the Catholic manner. He instituted what is known as the National Church of Belgium, which church, by the very Constitution of the nation, is denied the right of any propagation of the Gospel. It became ecclesiastical, formal, political.

In 1837 was founded La Société Évangélique Belge, or L'Église Chrétienne Missionnaire Belge, and the fires from this church began to warm and illuminate all the land. Composing its first general committee of eight were two British, two Dutch, one German, and three French members. This church seemed to be destined to be a force in God's hand for the bringing in of the pure Gospel to that needy people. But then there came in the devastating blight of Higher Criticism, and the light that glowed so hopefully has been sadly dimmed.

Through the years there has been a steady glow from a small group known as the "Plymouth Brethren," but the very nature of their gatherings pro-

hibited extensive work. Then the Salvation Army came in and bravely carried on in a corner of Brussels.

This was the condition of Belgium when the war began. Yet God had not forgotten this land, and His Word was bearing fruit.

One remarkable story is that of Professor LaGrange. He was a Professor of Astronomy and of Mathematics in the Military School, Belgium's West Point. He closely investigated the Bible and it convinced him that it was God's own message of salvation. He began to talk of his belief in the Bible as the Word of God, in the Military School. The Directors of the Mission have met many men who have had, at least, an intellectual belief in the Bible through his defence of it. The Catholic influence was so strong and antagonistic that he was finally dismissed from the School. But he has remained steadfast in the faith and is a frequent attendant at the Belgian Gospel Mission Hall in Brussels.

He is a member of the Academy of Sciences of Brussels, and many of his associates there began to ridicule and shun him because of his defence of the Scriptures. His Majesty, King Albert, often invited Professor LaGrange to the Royal Palace and (as can be inferred from the fact of the Letter to the King, in Professor LaGrange's book, "Lessons on the Word of God") discussed religious matters with him. He came to know of the ostracism to which the Professor was being subjected. On one occa-

sion, at a meeting of all the members of the Academy, as well as great ecclesiastics, at the King's Palace in Laeken, His Majesty, entering the room, passed by all the other academicians and warmly grasped the hand of Professor LaGrange, an act of gracious consideration which led to a changed attitude on the part of the professor's colleagues.

One of the strong defenders of the faith in Belgium is Col. Galet, a former aide-de-camp to King Albert, and President of the Military School. Not long ago Major LeSaffre, one of the Professors of this school, a member of the General Staff, confided to the Colonel that he had lost his faith in the religious system in which he had been born. Col. Galet advised him to attend the meetings of the Mission, and some months ago Major LeSaffre was baptized, and is now a member of the Assembly of the Mission in Brussels. Other military men are beginning to come to these meetings and the Directors of the Mission have talked with others whom they believe to have been led to Christ through Professor LaGrange's influence. Colonel Galet himself gives the following testimony:

"Our dear Pastor Mr. Wälti [of the Assembly of the Mission in Brussels] has asked me for a declaration of faith for the Belgian Gospel Mission. It is with a real desire to be useful to the Mission that I accept the invitation.

"The Belgian Gospel Mission was born at the Belgian Front at the beginning of the war. The Belgian army after it had bravely defended its whole

territory and had fought at the Yser, had arrived at the last point of exhaustion. A large part of the troops were in hospital; those who remained in the army were completely destitute. The spiritual distress of these men, for the most part kept in ignorance of the Gospel, was not less than their material distress. Then it was that Mr. and Mrs. Norton, moved with compassion at the sight of this misery, began this great work of spiritual relief in the army. It was to extend later to the entire nation. The Belgian Gospel Mission thus began its work in the army and during the war, and several of its members are ex-soldiers who were wounded in the war. That is why this declaration will deal with the development of my spiritual life in respect to the events of the war.

“In 1900 I had reached the age of thirty years. Up to this time I had successfully followed the training in the highest grade schools of the land. I had been taught many things, I was spoken to about many books except one—the Bible.

“At this time I scarcely knew of the existence of the Book. As to its contents, they were absolutely unknown to me.

“This fact of my experience shows the attitude toward the Bible in our land. Not only the people, but also the educated classes, are in great ignorance in respect to it. This situation justifies the work of the Belgian Gospel Mission, which consists in making known the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible. Having thus lived without faith until the

age of thirty years, I had gone very low on the fatal slope, when God brought me into contact with a man of faith who instructed me in the Bible. From this moment I was won over to the faith and then began—a slow work of spiritual growth. From then on I did not cease to read and to meditate upon the Book, until the time when the war coming on, I found myself occupying the position of military Counsel to our Sovereign, His Majesty, King Albert.

“In this capacity throughout the war, I had to propose to the King movements of the army, or to give my opinion on important operations which might cause the loss of thousands of men. I realized the moral responsibilities that such opinions carried with them, often based on uncertain situations that war presents.

“In the course of five years of war and day after day I did not cease to search the Scriptures and to ask in prayer for the necessary light and strength. They were always given to me. Since these events have passed by, and the clouds have been dissipated, I have often felt sure that the measures which I was directed to take were adequate to the situation.

“Thus I have fully experienced in the course of these years of war the truth of Psalm 119, ‘Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.’

“This is the testimony that for a long time I wanted to give in order that all the good which was accomplished and all the evil which was avoided in these grave circumstances might be attributed to

God alone, according to the statement in Psalm 36,
'In Thy light shall we see light.'

"Colonel Galet,

"Hon. Aide-de-Camp to the King."

And Major LeSaffre writes:

"Although brought up in the Catholic religion, I lost no time, when my first communion had been taken, in giving up attending the services and becoming indifferent as regards all religion. The liberal circle in which I lived, the bitter attacks made upon it by the Catholic clergy, the notorious intolerance of these latter, all contributed to drive me away from practices so contrary to the pure Christian spirit.

"The war and all its horrors resulted in giving me a clearer vision of the vanity of political, social and religious quarrels. In the face of danger fraternal feelings strengthened in me and my tolerance grew. Being obliged, in the course of my service, to take part frequently in Roman Catholic funerals and to assist at official manifestations, I could not help noticing the beauty of these ceremonies and realizing that they were admirably adapted to the troublous times through which we were passing. I even felt, at times, a desire to believe the Catholic dogmas, the only ones with which I was acquainted, though very superficially. Alas! I felt it was impossible. One of my friends, a firm Catholic, frequently talked to me on this subject, and though I would have asked nothing better

than to let myself be convinced, he never succeeded in doing so.

“After the armistice, I was called to the teaching staff of the military academy. This establishment is under the orders of Colonel Galet, the one of all my old professors for whom I had the most admiration, esteem and respect; admiration for his clear teaching, esteem for his beauty of character (humility, kindness, uprightness and disinterestedness), and finally respect for himself as a whole.

“At that moment I was ignorant of the fact that my chief was a sincere Christian. When I realized this fact I was greatly impressed and I feel now that this was the first step in my conversion.

“Indeed, as soon as I was aware of this new aspect of the character of my chief, I tried to get at the bottom of it and I found that he was very friendly with Professor LaGrange, late Director of the Brussels Observatory, member of the Academy of Science, and author of a book entitled ‘Lessons on the Word of God.’

“I got hold of this book and read it with avidity, for it brought me irresistible proofs of the plenary inspiration of the Bible. Intellectually I was convinced, but my heart did not respond at once. I bought a Bible and very quickly felt the need of meeting with other Christians. This feeling led me to go to an evangelical church, and there I had the joy of meeting Col. Galet, and I went back again several times. One day the Colonel spoke to me of

the Belgian Gospel Mission and urged me to go to one of their services, adding that there was much life in that church.

“I went the following Sunday, and there my conversion was fully accomplished and I gave my whole heart to the Lord.”

Another is Professor Schuyters, who was for some time Professor of Biology in the State School of Antwerp and who lost his position for the same reason as did Professor LaGrange. When Mr. Norton talked with Professor Schuyters he said to him, “Professor, how did you become a Christian?” And he answered, “Through Professor LaGrange. I heard of him, got a Bible myself, read it and accepted Christ as my Saviour.” The occasion for Mr. Norton’s visit to this gentleman was to ask what use he was making of the Testaments the Mission was sending him, and he replied that he was endeavoring to place a copy of the Word in the hands of every student in that School. Mr. Norton said, “Professor, you will lose your professional head if you continue to do this.” The Professor responded, “Mr. Norton, the history of the Belgian people proves that when we are once convinced of the truth, we will stand for it, whatever may be the cost.”

He was dismissed from his position soon after that, because he so freely defended his new-found faith.

He told Mr. Norton this remarkable story, which

seemed to indicate a change in the attitude of the Academy of Sciences in Brussels toward the Bible. He said, "I spoke before the Academy some time since. I selected as my topic the Bible, not knowing what reception it would have. Many of the members came to congratulate me after the address. Mr. Norton, they have asked me to speak again this year. What do you think they have asked me to speak on?—the Bible!"

The contrast between the central teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, and those of the Evangelical Protestant Churches was vividly and memorably set forth in an interview with Pastor Lauwers, of the little Dutch Reformed congregation in Brussels.

He was, as a boy of fifteen, a novitiate in a monastery in Bruges, and again in Ghent. Then he became a monk of the Carmelite order, later a teacher of philosophy after years of training, and then he was father-confessor to many of the most prominent persons in Brussels in a leading Roman Catholic Church.

He became especially interested in independent Bible study, and after some two years' retirement from his usual duties, in order to devote himself to that study, he returned, not to take up his previous and prominent service, for which his years of training had fitted him, but to turn aside from all that, and to renounce his allegiance to the church and system in which his youth and maturing manhood had been spent.

No one who has not undertaken such a reversal

of long-cherished alliances can know the cost of such a change. But Pastor Lauwers, I think, revealed in a single sentence what was the new-found central truth that had caused him to take such a step, when he said with deep emotion, "I am so persuaded of my sins that *I* cannot be my Saviour!" That is, no doctrine of works can satisfy the soul that once has seen the vision of its own sin and the saving grace of the Lord Jesus. And no system of doctrine that teaches salvation by works is the Gospel, or is anything but hopeless. That is why the Gospel message of God's free grace is especially needed in a land like Belgium, and why the hungry and weary are ready to listen to that which replaces the hopelessness of constant works to be wrought for salvation, by the assurance of what God does for the sinner through Christ by unmerited favor, unto salvation not of works but of grace. So, just as Mr. Norton has written concerning the hunger of the crowd:

"People will stand by the hundreds to listen to the Gospel, and gladly receive Scriptures; many wait to speak to us about their doubts and fears, and express a desire to know Christ as their Saviour. Previous to the war they would scarcely accept a Scripture or halt to listen to the Gospel, and, indeed, were apt to abuse and stone those who were preaching the truth on the streets.

"Not only do these hundreds of people listen attentively to the Word as it is preached on the street, but many seek personal interviews and accept Christ

as their Saviour, and rarely is a Gospel refused. Everywhere there is a keen desire for the Word of God. A Belgian Christian who has been a colporteur under the British and Foreign Bible Society for twenty-five years, and who the secretary of that Society told me was one of the best, if not the best, they had in Belgium, told me some time since that he had never in those twenty-five years seen such eagerness on the part of the people to receive the Word of God.

“It seemed to us when we first entered Belgium, in December, 1918, and for months afterwards, that the Spirit of God was working in mighty power and convicting the people of sin, and that the whole land was crying out for the Gospel. Satan, we feel, saw this threatening danger to his kingdom, and, as he always does, sent a counter move—the spirit of unrest and Bolshevism. Yet the day is not lost—far from it; and if we now move forward at His call there will be a mighty turning to him and great things, we believe, will be accomplished for his glory in that land.”

CHAPTER VII

AMONG THE OUT-STATIONS

We were hut-hunting one day. We had driven over the areas near Ypres, and had traced the ravages of war across many miles of lovely farmlands, where the August sunshine was pouring down its flood of blessing upon the fertile earth.

A few miles below Ypres there is a collection of hangars, or large huts, some of them standing just as they were when the war closed, and others lying in orderly piles of lumber arranged for further disposition. These huts, or hangars, were now for sale, and the directors of the Belgian Gospel Mission had thought that perhaps some of them might be utilized for material for meeting-places in the smaller towns.

If you are looking about among these signs of war's aftermath, you are very sure to meet Chevalier and Madame Hansenne. Chevalier Hansenne has charge of the sale of the huts, and he and his good wife live in a charming little house put together of the same sort of material that one would find in a summer portable cottage in America. You will receive a hearty welcome from both.

Both are in the prime of life, but like so many others in Belgium they look far older than they really are. Perhaps some of us would be aged more than we are if we, too, had spent as much time as they did in German prisons. Chevalier Hansenne



HUT HUNTING NEAR YPRES
A PART OF A PURCHASE OF 100,000 TESTAMENTS IN THE YARD OF THE
HEADQUARTERS, BRUSSELS
A CHILDREN'S TENT MEETING IN SELZAATE

was arrested for having given information to the Belgians concerning certain German submarine work, and he was imprisoned and condemned to death. His wife was imprisoned also, and she will tell you how she spent some thirty-four months in a German prison, where at night, after the day's work, she was herded in one large room with a hundred other women.

In the bright dining-room of their small house you will see a picture of Madame Hansenne as she was just before the war. She looks at it rather deprecatingly and shakes her head over it, and then smiles at you in her kindly way. Let her take you about the house and show you some of the relics that her husband and herself have gathered up from the neighboring battlefields. They will show you, but only if you urge them to do so, the insignia of the Order of Leopold, conferred by the king, and will point with considerable pride and no little exactness to the very chair and the spot at the table where the Queen sat one day when she visited their little home.

When Mrs. Howard and Madame Hansenne were standing together in the little garden beside the house, Chevalier Hansenne brought out a Bible that had been given to him while he was in prison. It was interesting to turn over the leaves and see some of the passages that he had marked on those dark days. There was a flaw in the evidence against him, so his sentence was not carried out. He had been learning something about the Gospels he had

never known before. He pointed us to the tenth chapter of Hebrews, and there, strongly marked, were the verses including the Holy Spirit's teaching concerning sacrifices. Putting his finger upon the eleventh and twelfth verses, "And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God," he exclaimed as he showed the verses to Mrs. Howard, "*Oui, Oui, Madame! C'est vrai, C'est vrai!*" He had been learning that the works which the church of dominant influence in his land had been laying upon its people would not take away sin, and his face showed his delight over his discovery of these passages.

Our visit among the huts that day took us over to one side of the little settlement where families were living in cosy homes made from some of these buildings. The semi-circular corrugated iron roof was covered with painted canvas, the lower sides of the walls close to the ground had been built up with cement, and inside the huts partitions had been erected, making one good-sized room across the front with two windows, and then two bedrooms to the rear and a kitchen beyond that. In the interior were bright and pretty curtains, and simple, comfortable furniture. In front of the hut was a garden, and you may be sure that every Belgian has his garden if he can find any earth in which to plant vegetables or flowers. The family living in the hut

seemed to be very comfortable, and indeed there were many such families in that area and elsewhere, not yet able to build houses such as they once had, but meanwhile apparently quite comfortable in these improvised homes.

Was our little journey that day worth while? By way of answer, just before these words were written comes one of the latest reports from the Belgian Gospel Mission stating that at Eecloo, the new hall, a wooden hut built on ground acquired by the Mission, was opened in December. It holds comfortably about one hundred and twenty people, but more than two hundred crowded in, and many had to be turned away on the evening when the hall was opened. I had been in Eecloo and had visited the rented building then occupied by the Mission. It was in an inconvenient part of the town, and once had been used as a diamond cutting and polishing factory. The "diamonds" it was polishing when I was there were indeed rough diamonds, but very precious in the Lord's sight. It was known at that time that the hall might be required for other purposes, and the Mission workers were a little doubtful as to what new arrangements could be made. But the army huts became the solution of the problem. On the Wednesday following the opening of the hall, the place was again full. "One of the workers," says the report, "had translated an English hymn into Flemish and had spoken on it to the people. The Spirit of God came down upon the meeting with such power that the leader felt con-

strained to call upon those who wanted to know more to stay for an after-meeting. Twenty-seven grown people remained, all went down on their knees and prayed, and many came to full deliverance. The following Wednesday the same thing happened, with a number added to the church." So the hut-hunting expedition was not in vain.

It will be interesting to friends of the Belgian Gospel Mission to know that by means of the army huts the work of the Mission can be more readily extended to places where there is already an urgent call on the part of the people themselves for permanent meeting-places, and this extension can thus be made at a minimum of expense. At Eecloo if a similar room had been erected it would have cost about two thousand dollars. By using the army hut material the hall cost about a thousand dollars, or, with the land, about fifteen hundred dollars, which is a very reasonable cost indeed in the light of present prices for land and buildings in crowded Belgium. What has been a very real problem in the extension of the work of the Mission thus finds a partial solution, although of course in some of the larger places the army hut material would not serve the purpose.

Every good Mission enterprise tells the story of personal sacrifice. Not that those who make the sacrifice think of it in that light. Yet such work would fall short of its fullest power if it were not costly to the workers. One day we visited the neighborhood of the village of Oost Roosebeke, not far

from the trenches of the battle front. It is a compact little village in itself, of the usual brick houses found in rural Belgium, but beyond the confines of the village there is a thickly populated farming community. The Belgian farms average something less than five acres each, and they are cultivated as though every foot of ground were especially precious and productive, which, indeed, is the case.

On our way to the village we tarried for a little while at the home of Mr. Meersman, one of the col-porteurs of the Mission. He purchased the house with the aid of his soldier bonus in order to make a home for his parents, and one of the first steps that he took after acquiring the property was to offer to the Mission a piece of his small holding upon which a Mission hall might be built. Recently this property has been accepted by the Mission, and now a little building has been erected there where meetings are held.

At the end of the opening meeting in the new hall at Oost Roosebeke, Mr. Norton told the people that he wanted to send a special message to the lady who had generously subscribed the money for building the hall, and asked what he was to say to her. Little by little the message was given, and Mr. Norton was assured that the people would remain faithful; that they would hold fast to the Word of God; and would tell others of the wonderful love of their Saviour. When he asked, "How many of you have been converted through the work carried on thus far at Oost

Roosebeke?" greatly to his joy thirty-five or forty people raised their hands, eagerly, whole-heartedly.

On the day of our visit, we passed on beyond Mr. Meersman's home into the village itself, and there attended a meeting in another home, a little house with four or five rooms, on one side of a court in the rear of some other village homes. Nearly thirty people were crowded into one room where the service was held. Some had walked for two hours in order to get to the meeting. One elderly woman had walked about three miles, with a rheumatic foot which made her limp very noticeably. When we left the meeting we had the privilege of taking her home for her first ride in an automobile, and her gratitude and fearsome interest were impressive!

It is in such places as this that one finds the evidences of personal sacrifice. One young man in the meeting at Oost Roosebeke, a powerfully built young farmer, who might serve very well as center on an American football team, had been a Christian about nine months. His family were entirely out of sympathy, to say the least, with his stand, and consequently his father and brothers took every opportunity literally to "beat him up," and upon more than one occasion he had been obliged to defend himself against such attacks. None of this had deterred him from his purpose. His face was as bright and cheerful as the face of a strong young man could possibly be, and he fully intends after his tour of Belgian army duty to enter the Bible Training School at Brussels conducted by the Mission, and

to give his life to work for the Lord. One young girl in the meeting, reminding me very much of a certain little American girl, said that she was hoping after a time to be able to go to the Bible Training School and to give her life to Christian service.

Thus up through the bewildering conditions in such a land as Belgium, and up through all the smothering overlay of superstition and bondage, there arises and pushes forth the evidence of what God is doing in the lives of those who are willing to accept his Son our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the little town of Ath the room occupied by the work of the Mission became far too small, and a larger hall has been purchased. Here Maurice Mafille, a Frenchman, a graduate of the Mission's Bible Institute, is in charge, as also at Leuze and Cambron Casteau,—a most devoted and earnest worker. I shall never forget a service in that smaller room. In the company there were children and old folks, men and women, and some whose faces haunt one until this hour. I was introduced to one man after the service who had recently become a Christian, and he has requested the workers of the Mission to arrange so that he may be married to the woman with whom he has lived for many years, and who is the mother of his children, some of whom were with him in the meeting. Thus the work goes deep into life itself, and one's heart is thrilled by the searching and vital character of the regeneration that comes to those

who hear the Word, where hitherto they have been under the bondage of superstition.

One rainy afternoon we were speeding north from Ghent, in company with Mr. Mietes, of the Mission in Bruges; Mr. Hilberinck, of the stations at Selzaete and Eecloo; and Mr. R. V. Bingham, of Toronto, Canada, the Director of the Sudan Interior Mission. Our road ran along one of the great canals that constitute important waterways from the interior of Belgium to the sea, and toward evening we reached the town of Selzaete, lying close along both sides of the canal.

In a little square and near the entrance to a drinking saloon, we placed the portable organ upon the stones of the street, and gathered about it to sing the opening hymns of the service. A drunken man appeared in the door of the saloon, and in some excitement reeled out toward us, gesticulating energetically, and protesting against the meeting. One of the workers talked quietly with him, and he soon retired grumbling into the saloon, while other men hung about, and groups of the neighborhood folks gathered in the rain, paying no attention to the rain itself, while the workers passed about the sheets containing the hymns, and told the Gospel story as directly as possible to the group that had gathered.

You could see signs of friendliness, and signs of real suspicion, on the faces of the men and women who were standing near. They were shy, and not over-anxious to get too close to the speaker; but notwithstanding the dark afternoon and the down-



THE MISSION HALL AT ATH
THE MISSION HALL AT OOST ROOSEBEKE
THE CONGREGATION AT LIEGE

pour of rain, the meeting went on, and there was interest evidenced on every hand in what the missionaries were able to say.

We turned away from the square at last, and drove back through the town, finding our way to the "hall" of the Mission. It hardly merited that name, although all the meeting-places are called halls in Belgium. It was evidently a remodeled stable. The floor was of earth, a large doorway that had opened out toward the street on the side of the stable had been boarded up and hung with a rough curtain. Excellent wooden benches had been supplied, such as one finds in all the halls of the Mission in the smaller towns.

Shortly after the meeting began a group of men entered the already well-filled room, and stood quietly listening. They were customs officials, and were among the most attentive listeners as the hymns were sung and the Gospel was unfolded.

There was one unforgettable personality in that crowd, a very lame shoemaker, whose face simply shone with the light of his faith. He was an outstanding Christian in that community, and with him were various members of his family. He did not fail to express his delight over meeting the visitors from across the sea, and he stands in our memories as one of the trophies of God's grace, a man who testifies in his own community to the power of the grace of God in his life.

The little meeting hall was separated somewhat from the dwelling house of the property by a dark

courtyard. When the meeting was over we emerged into the night to cross the court, and to have supper with the friends who were caring for our welfare at that place of privilege. After the supper we once more went out into the night, and as we stepped out from the brightly lighted room we realized how very dark was the court leading out to the street. We could hardly see our way at all, so one of the women carried in her hand a dim lamp to show us the way to the gate, and then across the pavement to the waiting car.

Mrs. Howard was profoundly impressed with the experience of the last few hours, as, indeed, we all were. Later she said to me: "Can you ever forget that little lamp as we came out through the dark courtyard? It was such a very dim light, and it gave only a little light to keep us from stumbling. I could not help thinking," she said, "of the churches we have at home, with all the light we have had all these years, in contrast to the very little that the people in Belgium have had!"

The memory of the faces in the meeting went with us as we sped on over the wet roads through the misty darkness toward the Mission house in Bruges, where we were to arrive very late that night. It was a quiet group in the car. The lights of the car picked out the roadway little by little for us as we sped along, bringing into sharp relief the silent homes of the villages through which we passed, and the tall, shimmering wet trunks and overhanging foliage of the trees beside the great roadway. We

were newly impressed with the privilege of carrying the light to the shadowy places of that beautiful land, and into the lives of the kindly and eager-hearted and needy people dwelling therein.

Perhaps some of us can do more than we have ever yet done to light the lamps in the dim courtyards and byways with the Gospel light for those who have walked in the shadows in Belgium.

"Dour was for a long time the subject of importunate prayer," wrote Mrs. Norton, "and this large town close to Charleroi had been for years without a faithful preacher of the Gospel. A little group of Protestants had begged us for months to come, before the prayer we offered was heard and a house was procured and a pastor found.

"A little later, after the opening of the hall at Dour, the neighboring town of Warquignies, a typical mining town, had been visited by our tent. There was left there a group of young Christians who desired a meeting, and shortly after the opening of the Dour work, a meeting was begun at Warquignies under the direction of Mr. Jules Neusy, who was also speaking at Dour. Some time after, the Warquignies people were able to have a hall of their own, reconstructed from an old blacksmith's shop, which the Mission purchased, and in this place of meeting, once during the week, and on Sundays they have their own services, and Sunday-school, and Bible class. This is a post as flourishing and promising as any in the Mission, but what is the story of this well beloved pastor?

“He first saw the light of day in the home of a miner in this very section of Belgium, and was baptized in the Catholic Church. He tells us that although his mother became a Protestant, when he was three and a half years old, yet it was twenty years later before she understood what salvation is, —only a few days in fact before her death.

“When the young Jules was only twelve years old, as was customary then, he in his turn descended into the mine, to begin his work. Here, he tells us, because of his contact with other youths who were irreligious, he lost touch entirely with religious services. As a boy he developed gifts as an amateur actor, but he says that young as he was, after an evening passed in this way, he was struck at the heart by the emptiness of all these things of the world. He came under conviction of sin. This conviction deepened into veritable anguish of soul. While at his work, he tells us, he trembled at the least sound above, and was afraid when descending and ascending the shaft of the mine. In those days he had to enter the mine at four o'clock in the morning.

“One time, he was having to walk for a half hour through the subterranean passage of the mine. While making this march he, all of a sudden, felt himself pushed to his knees. It was his conviction that drove him there, and his anguish of soul was changed to peace and joy, and rising, he continued his way as he says, *‘Tout joyeux.’* He commenced right there his career as a Gospel preacher,

and Gospel singer, which he continues to this day, without ceasing. I have never been with him when he could refrain himself many minutes from breaking into song. A sore throat, or a cold, are things of too small moment to hinder the outbreak of Gospel song. He, too, came to long to work for the Lord.

“Unhappily, in the Protestant church which he frequented, the pastor held the modern views, and despite the fact that Jules Neusy got no help from this quarter, he was kept by God from lapsing into unbelief. At last he did find a little group of faithful Christians, and soon became a leader amongst them. He gathered the young men about him for Bible study and held many meetings in the open air. Then came the war, and all open air meetings were forbidden. When he could not work elsewhere, he gathered people into the kitchens, and sometimes during the day there would be a hundred people or more in attendance. Many during this time of suffering found the Lord as their Saviour, through his ministry.

“With the close of the war, and the coming of the Belgian Gospel Mission, Mr. Neusy cast in his lot with us. He took first of all a year’s training at the Bible school, and since that time has been the efficient and well beloved pastor of these two centers, Dour and Warquignies.”

In quite another type of locality I attended a meeting, memorable for its far-reaching significance,—in a large private home in the city of Liége.

It has sometimes been said that the Belgian Gospel Mission is seeking to do a work where adequate church facilities and true evangelism already exist. On the contrary, in very few of the towns outside of the cities of Brussels and Antwerp were there any Protestant churches at the time the Mission entered the field. And while there was, and is, a church in Liege, members of the congregation there had become so dissatisfied with the Modernist teaching from its pulpit, that a deputation was sent to Mr. Norton, with the urgent request that the Mission would begin a work in that city. Hence the crowded meeting in that home on a bright Sunday morning—not the first, but a continuation of many. What transpired in the meeting was not more important than the fact of the meeting. For now the Mission has a center in Liège, with Pastor Henri Bolomey in charge,—a Swiss pastor of a French church in America for several years, and now conducting a work that is rapidly outgrowing its facilities.

But consider still another type. Dour and Warquignies are mining towns not far from the French border, on the southern edge of Belgium. The houses are mostly of brick, and stand close to the narrow streets. The mines are immediately under the towns themselves, and the towering mining machinery lifts its iron supports high above the houses.

At Dour, we called at one of the homes to see Isoline. She received us in the living room of her

house, and then took us out into the garden to show us her flowers.

Isoline was one of the converts of the tent meetings. She is over seventy years of age, a sweet-faced, gentle old lady, cordial in her welcome and quite ready to tell us her story. As we took the seats that she offered us in the living room, she pointed to a place by her side, and told us that just there during one of the days of the war a shell came through the open door and killed her daughter, who was sitting beside her. Isoline found difficulty in telling us the story, but her face wonderfully brightened as she said that she believes she could not have lived since that time unless she had been sure that Christ her Lord was sustaining her.

She has been a Christian only two or three years, and during that time had been under great pressure to return to the church in which she had her membership. The priest has tried hard to persuade her to return by telling her of the evil consequences that are sure to come to her because of her new allegiance, but she has firmly refused. He even went so far as to tell her that if she did not return, and did not continue her contributions to a society to which she belonged, that this would prolong her daughter's days in Purgatory. The shame and dreadfulness of such a threat can only be realized by one who has had the privilege of talking with Isoline in her little home, amid the neighborhood surroundings, where one can imagine what it is to be separate and apart from nearly all of the folks with whom

one has lived; and especially to be under the ban of the dominant church in the locality. But Isoline is standing firm, and the joy in her face and voice is unmistakable, as she tells you what Christ has meant to her.

In the neighboring village of Warquignies we visited an old couple, over eighty years of age, who had never heard the Gospel until a year or two ago when the tent of the Belgian Gospel Mission came to the town. Some of Monsieur Vilain's friends said he ought to go, and at last, he says, "It became necessary for me to be converted."

He and his wife, accordingly, became devoted Christians, and their little home is most happy in these glad days since their conversion.

On the walls of the room used as a kitchen and sitting room were texts from Scripture, and there was a goodly supply of hymn-books close at hand. The old man pointed to the wall-texts, one of them reading, "*Je puis tout par Christ qui me fortifie*,"—"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me;" the other, "*L'eternel est ma lumiere et mon salut*,"—"The Lord is my light and my salvation."

Soon Monsieur Vilain brought out the hymn-books, and offered to one of us a book, on the fly-leaf of which some fifteen or twenty of his favorite hymns had been noted. He handed books to each of us, and just then his wife began to sing the hymn, "Oh, the Best Friend Is Jesus."

These two-year-old Christians sat there in their



MADAME AND MONSIEUR VILAIN



ISOLINE

little kitchen and sang for us while we joined as best we could in the hymns. The old man in his patched overalls and loose blouse, with his steel-rimmed glasses, gray hair and beard, was a typical elderly Belgian, while beside him sat his wife wearing her decorated white cap, checked blouse and apron, and wooden shoes.

"Is it true," asked one of us, "that Jesus is your best friend?"

Quickly came the answer, "*C'est vrai, C'est vrai!*" repeated for emphasis to show how strongly the old man felt about this new-found friend of his. Until two years ago these old people had never heard the Gospel.

On another day some of us were privileged to visit the little village of Cambron-Casteau, and especially to call upon the Count du Val de Beaulieu. In our group were the two latest accessions to the Mission staff, Mr. and Mrs. John C. Winston, who had only the day before arrived from America. Mr. Winston, coming as he did with some knowledge of French, and with a college and Bible Institute training in his equipment, was soon to have much responsibility in the Mission, as representing Mr. Norton during the latter's absences in deputation work. He saw many sides of the Mission enterprise even on this one day's journey. During the war, when the Count's estate was in the possession of the Germans, and he himself an exile in England, a layman there led the Count to Christ. It was in a little Protestant Chapel that the Count heard the story of

Christ's love, and through the help of this friend, he found Christ as his Saviour.

Mrs. Norton once asked the Count, "If I should wish to speak of your conversion when I write home, might I have the permission to do so, if I do not mention your name?"

"Use my name also if you write," he said; "certainly I have nothing to fear."

The Count had been at some of the meetings at the Mission in the beginning in Brussels; had invited the workers to take up a work in his village, and had rendered active help.

On the day of our visit, the Count received us most cordially, and permitted us to see the repairs that he had been able to make in the great chateau, a building about the size of the White House in Washington, and accommodating some two hundred Germans during the occupation of Belgium. Not even the years and the special efforts that had intervened since the close of the war had entirely cleared up the wreckage. The Chateau is less than a hundred years old, but it stands on historic ground. For close to the site of the great house, not more than a hundred yards away from it on the estate, are the ruins of a monastery erected by St. Bernard in 1151, and finished in 1240. Here, in the middle ages, members of distinguished Belgian families were buried, and their mutilated stone effigies are seen today in the ruins, for during the French Revolution the abbey was almost entirely destroyed.

There were now rubbish piles in front of the

chateau itself, reminders of the enemy occupation, and while much work had been done to restore the beauty of the original wall decorations, and to replace the broken and otherwise damaged furniture, nevertheless it was evident that great havoc had been wrought there. Moving through the rooms of the chateau, and then later over the pathways and under the trees of the great estate, with its lovely park and pastureland, and the beautiful old ruins of the abbey, it was difficult to imagine what a radical change had taken place in the life of the Count, since he had dissolved the old associations, and had given himself to the life of a Protestant Christian. At the period of our visit, he was holding meetings for the village folks and for his own staff, in one of the out-buildings of the estate. He had not yet been able to occupy the main house, but himself was living in one of the small buildings. After our visit with him, and with others who had been touched by the work of the Mission, and who were now interested in the extension of that work, either because of what it had done for them, or because of a new-found interest in the light of their new faith, it was clear that everywhere in that fair land there are those both in high places and low who are eager for the Gospel.

CHAPTER VIII

OPEN-AIR AND TENT WORK

The colportage work of the Mission is extended and continuous. There is never any time during the year when the colporteurs are idle. In the summer season, however, the conditions of life and of temperature make it possible to hold outdoor and tent meetings. The Mission owns two large tents, with a full equipment of folding benches or settees, and with appropriate lighting apparatus.

These tents are moved from place to place during the summer in an effort to reach unevangelized towns, and also to locate a tent where there is a possibility that the attitude of the people will result in a more permanent work to be carried on largely under the immediate direction of the people of the town, but as a part of the general Mission.

Under these methods, town after town has been opened to the Gospel. Colporteurs distribute literature and arouse interest in the possibility of bringing the tent to town, and posters are put up in conspicuous places, announcing the coming of the meetings. It is sometimes difficult to find an appropriate place for a tent, but the Lord has marvelously led in all this, so that in many towns the locations are exceedingly good, and in other places not too remote from the centers of population.

With all their natural light-heartedness, and in-

terest in whatever may be exciting, Belgians do not appear to favor sensationalism in religious meetings. They love music, but the workers in the Mission have not thought it best to utilize, for example, the cornet, in summoning the people of the town to the tent-meetings. What would be a perfectly natural method in America for Americans may not be appropriate for work in Belgium. The Belgians love to sing, however, and when a tent is once located, there is much curiosity about the purpose of the meetings, so that when the workers open the meetings with considerable singing, the crowd gathers, and while shy at first, and somewhat reluctant to enter the tent, yet very soon the seats are well filled, and before the tent becomes crowded, there are many standing outside who are not quite ready to come in, but who are attracted by the singing, and by the novelty of the scene.

The tents are arranged precisely as in America, with comfortable seats, and with good ventilation throughout. A large platform is erected at one end of the tent, and a modest pulpit, and a portable organ adorn the platform. Steps lead to the platform from either side, and behind the structure there is a place where the workers can take their meals, and keep their supplies.

The messages are always purely Gospel messages. The people are hungry for the truth, and the novelty of it holds their attention so closely that the depth and wonder of the Gospel of Salvation begins to become a reality as the speakers go over and

over again the truth they wish to impress. The methods of the speakers are interesting to an observer, because, knowing the people as they do, they find it necessary to reiterate the points they wish to make, until the truth has fairly entered the minds of the listeners.

It should not be forgotten that in all war countries, whatever may be the national characteristics of the people, there is a mental deadening resulting from the terrible experiences through which practically every one has passed during the war years. Bereavement is of course common on every hand, as well as loss of property, and in many cases loss of health. The consequence is, that in both body and mind the people are depressed, and they are inclined to seek the lighter forms of recreation for distraction from the cares that have been resting so heavily upon their souls, rather than to turn to more serious pursuits. However, there is a real spiritual hunger, which is noticeable on every hand, and this breaks up through the stolid indifference that exists with regard to some aspects of life. When a people has suffered so severely as the Belgians have, and have come only a few years away from the period of invasion and loss and fear, they are not in the same mental, physical, or spiritual condition that one finds among a people living under more normal circumstances.

Tent work and open-air work are particularly effective among the Belgians, because of their suspicion of newcomers, for the open-air work and the

wide-open tent offer fewer obstacles to attendance upon meetings than when the people are invited into a home or hall.

One is bound to be impressed with the large number of men who attend the meetings; old men and young men are there in numbers that seem very significant. They are attentive and nearly always respectful. There is far less disorder in the crowd around the tents than in similar meetings in American cities. Printed sheets bearing the hymns used in the services are freely distributed throughout the crowd, and much attention is given to strong singing leadership, so that the volume of song rises gloriously as the crowd sings in French or Flemish the same Gospel hymns that are familiar wherever English is spoken.

There is little effort made at the tent meetings during the services to secure the signing of decision cards. Such cards are offered after the service is concluded, and the people are going out. By experience, the Mission workers have learned that it is well to be patient in this, and even though what might seem to be more direct results were secured by the signing of the cards during the meeting, yet the workers feel that much of this would be on impulse not sufficiently founded upon a knowledge of what the step means, and it is the practice of the Mission to build strong foundations so that those who do accept Christ and enter into the new life may do so intelligently.

Important as this is everywhere, it is imperative

in countries where persecution is sure to follow. Many a Belgian who has become identified with the services of the Mission and who has accepted Christ has suffered keenly by the step, and often is obliged to witness under great difficulty in the home neighborhood. If you were living in a town of ten thousand inhabitants, and should decide to step out from the old associations, and accept the simplicity of the Gospel, and should find that only two or three, or perhaps none of your neighbors were ready to do this at the same time, you would appreciate something of the position of the average Belgian who leaves the fold of the Roman Church.

It is reiteration of the Gospel truth, and the setting forth of the person of Christ as our sufficient Saviour, that proves gradually to them the difference between the religion of works that they have followed and the Gospel which is not a Gospel of works, but of grace. The wonder upon their faces as this begins to dawn upon them is heart-breaking, sometimes, and many in the crowd, under no exciting or emotion-arousing appeals, but under the most quiet and direct explanation of the Gospel, will often be found in tears. Many of the men will be leaning forward with heads bowed, and women will be quietly wiping the tears from their faces, as they hear the simple message of a man who perhaps a few years ago was an infidel, and who now is a devoted follower of the Lord Jesus.

In a tent meeting at Soignies one evening in the midst of a crowd of some four hundred and fifty

eager folks, a woman who was a very recent convert of the Mission was pointed out to me. I asked for the privilege of an interview.

"Madame," I asked, "did you know about the Bible before the tent came here?"

"Oh, no, Monsieur," came the quick reply, "I never knew the Bible. I never saw a Bible,"—as if my question had surprised her.

"But had you never heard the Gospel?" I asked,—for surely she must say "yes" to that.

"Oh, no, Monsieur. I never heard the Gospel before these meetings. I have lived in this town for fifty-seven years, and I do not know any one else here who has ever heard the Gospel."

Fifty-seven years old in a town of several thousand inhabitants beside a main line of railway, and yet!—yes, there is a harvest ready in Belgium.

A group of men discussing the meeting as they were leaving this tent on another evening were overheard by one of the workers: "That's a good religion they preached in there, a good religion." And one of them added, "Yes, and it's a better one than ours." So new is the simple Gospel to those who have lived in superstition and routine observances, that the "old, old story" is to them nothing less than a new religion.

The crowded tent at Soignies is a type of the responsiveness of the people to any opportunity to hear the Word of Life. Somewhat shy, and quite suspicious at first, the crowd drifts into and around the meeting places, or gathers about the speaker in

market place, or open square; and then follows an intensity of attention like that with which an American crowd watches the news bulletins during a critical hour of upheaval in the nation, or during a "world series" of baseball games. When the Belgian listens he bores into your mind, as you face from the platform the collective intentness of the audience. It is akin to the attention you get from eager children when they are captivated by a story, and you step cautiously from sentence to sentence lest you should lose the way for an instant, and so lose the following that is making such a demand upon you,—because they are hungry.

There are folks in that tent or little meeting hall who have walked miles to hear the preacher, and to join in the hymns they learn so quickly. You feel the responsibility of an interest such as that implies; and some of them that night, after they have lingered over "one more hymn, if you please," until a late hour, will sing all along the several miles of their homeward march in the moonlight, pouring out the gladness of their new-found hope across the little slumbering farmsteads and through the white villages on their way.

Until you examine a road map of Belgium you can hardly realize how thickly the country is strewn with highways and by-ways, and villages. At first glance the map is all places and no spaces. I do not envy the Belgian map-maker. But one may envy the evangelist his crowds, for wherever we went among the Belgian Gospel Mission stations,—and we

saw fourteen of the twenty (there are now twenty-four) besides market, tent, and street meetings,—whether the meeting-places were large or small, they were all well-filled, and some were simply packed, while the open-air meetings drew crowds everywhere.

Curiosity is a mental quality that helps decidedly to bring the Belgian into touch with the Gospel. Many have been led into the Mission meetings, and into the light, by the curiosity that has led them to accept a tract, or a Gospel, or a Testament, at the hands of a worker. And in the great markets where crowds gather, hundreds of Testaments are sold by the Mission workers at a nominal price. We moved about in such a crowd in the market at St. Nikolas, and saw how busy the colporteurs were, after a large meeting, in trying to meet quickly the demand for Testaments that the hungry men and women pressed forward to buy. The market covered several acres with its wares of every sort, from cattle and hogs to wicker baskets and chairs, kitchen utensils, meats, vegetables, clothing, and fruit. And across the street at one side of the great square, within twenty-five yards of the meeting stood a substantial building, with a large sign in Flemish across the front,—“Hemelrijk Bierhuis,” which in English is “The Kingdom of Heaven Beer House.” This saloon includes one of the branches of “Het Davidsfonds,” a fund for the establishing of libraries. That is typical of the singularly frank mixture of a nominal religion with moral color-blindness among the

masses of the unconverted in Belgium, while over against such a monstrosity as that expressive sign, under the trees of the crowded square the little portable organ of the missionaries leads in the singing of the old Gospel hymns, and the words of life are spoken to receptive hearers to whom they are as wonderful as they are new.

In September, 1922, Mr. Norton received a petition signed by seventy-four people who had been especially blessed by the tent meetings at Braine-le-Comte, urging the Mission to establish a permanent meeting-place in their town. And not only there, but in a half-dozen other places where the seed has been sown, there is a welcome awaiting a permanent work,—in modest “halls” as all such meeting-places are called, though they may give room for only a hundred persons. It is by the multiplication of small meeting-places, which must be purchased, since renting is impracticable on account of local obstacles, that the pioneer colportage, tent, and open-air work of the Mission in wide evangelization can best be conserved.

“The Kingdom of Heaven Beer House” has a good building in a bad cause. What limit shall the Mission set to the number of small and larger good buildings in the best cause?

As a pioneer missionary agency the open-air service is distinctly needed, and is remarkably successful. There is much general ignorance of the Gospel and a reluctance to turn aside from the traditional religion, yet with all this, such hunger for some-



THE MARKET AT ST. NIKOLAS
A TYPICAL STREET MEETING
A BELGIAN "DOG-MOBILE"

thing different, that open-air meetings and the tent meetings readily draw crowds where the Gospel can be heard. The people are responsive. No one who loves the Lord could help being tremendously stirred when in one of the tent meetings the crowd was singing with earnest, powerful enthusiasm such a hymn as "*Publiez bien haut la grande nouvelle,*" or as we would say in English, "Publish Abroad the Good News." Then later as the same crowd listened to Mrs. Norton singing in her appealing voice, "*Pourquoi donc attendre?*", which is the equivalent of our Gospel song, "Why Do You Wait, Dear Brother?", one was not surprised at the rapt attention with which the crowd in the tent would listen to such a song as that, when rendered by the voice of such a singer, especially when one learns that the interest is sufficient to lead some thirty people to walk eight miles to attend that meeting. Some of those who had come thus far, after only the third day of the meeting cleared their homes of idolatrous images. Two Belgians, a thoughtful man and his wife, who had lived for some years in San Antonio, Texas, attended some of the tent meetings, and they told the workers that they were now going to seek the truth. On the second evening this couple agreed that "Jesus is the Son of God." On the third evening they threw out the images from their home, and they brought a gift of flowers to Mr. Neusy, the preacher, which they said was, "a gift in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."

It is in meetings like these that one's heart is

touched by the lives and the testimony of those who have been rescued from lives of open sin. One of the most earnest of the tent workers is Mr. Macors, a colporteur and a soul-winner, a hard worker at whatever task he is given to do. He was converted in 1918 during the war by a Testament given him in the train. He has now had his course of study in the Bible Institute of the Mission. He was a workman in the Civey quarry, and one of his accomplishments was his ability to drink habitually about a half-gallon of alcohol every day. It was 1 John 5:13 that led him to Christ, at a time when he was immersed in alcohol and smoking about ninety cigarettes a day. His fiancée prayed that these desires might be taken away from him, and, praise God, they were. It is an experience to see Macors leading the singing in one of the tent-meetings, beating the time with vigorous gestures from his powerful arms and shoulders, his strong face working with emotion, and his vigorous voice ringing out the joy of his own experience of Christ, in order that others may be led to Him.

Both in the tent work and out-of-door meetings, and in colportage there are striking examples of the changes wrought in the life of many a present worker. Jean Quaedpeerds was a coal miner at Grace Baleur, a suburb of Liége. A few years ago he bought from a colporteur a copy of the Gospels and Acts,—and shelved the copy for three years! Then he began to read it. He overheard two men talking in the mine about being Christians. He

inquired what that meant. He joined a little group that met each Sunday, but he could understand little of what was said, until a brother read to him the third chapter of John,—and then he found Christ. He gave his spare time to colportage, and prayed that he might be used in the Lord's work in the province of Limburg; he met Mrs. Norton, who almost at once asked him,—“When are you going to Limburg?” He went, and now he has established under great difficulties a station at Hasselt. He was once arrested, and brought before the judge, charged with selling “devil's books,” but he was released, and has kept persistently at work in spite of much opposition.

And what shall be said of another colporteur,—Jules Michiels, a convert of the war? In four years he has placed 65,000 Gospels in 65,000 homes, in 131 villages and towns with a population of 392,000 people. He has placed Gospels in seven to eight-tenths of the homes in the territory covered, and in some districts in nine-tenths.

I can never forget the faces of the persons whom I was able to observe in the war-zone at the time of the armistice, and just before. The French and Belgian soldiers of twenty-five years of age to all appearances were easily men of forty. The women had lost their youth under the terrific onset of the problems of the war. The devastation of the land was nothing as compared with the devastation of souls, easily discernible in the conversation and the faces of the people. That same condition has by no

means disappeared, and if the message of the saving Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is needed in tent and open-air meetings in lands where the Protestant Church is strong and widely distributed, how much more is such work needed, and how wonderfully effective it is, in lands where agnosticism, superstition, fear and depression have laid their deadly hands upon the people!

Mrs. Norton has told of an incident at one of the tent meetings at Dour. A young blind man in his early thirties was going along the street one night when he was arrested by the sound of singing—"Whosoever Will, May Come," was the song. He entered the tent and was converted. The Nortons met him at Dour on one of their visits. Almost the first thing he said was: "I was blind, but now I can see!" "He is a quaint and interesting character," writes Mrs. Norton,—"fearless in witnessing for the Master. Just after his conversion, he had a hard time to live. During the war, when every one was hungry, it was his wont to go to the homes of the village and get food for such services as turning the mangle on wash-day, grinding of meal and the like. After his conversion his friends began to reproach him for his change of religion. 'You Protestants,' they sneered, 'have only a little humble place of meeting.' 'Well, I don't know about that,' was his reply. 'But I remember that Jesus was born in a stable, so I shouldn't mind that.' At first his whole family used to taunt him. Now prac-

tically every one is coming to the meetings, and his father, the worst blasphemer in the village, and his mother, have been converted.

“This young blind man has learned to read the Bible in Braille, and it is a beautiful thing to hear him read his Bible aloud to the children in Sunday-school.”

There are other blind men and blind women in Belgium whose eyes are yet to be opened, and whose hearts will have a song in them one of these days because of the work that the Mission is doing. On one of our visits, we passed through the town of Waterloo, and spent several hours on the battle-field. On a corner of the village street is the house where Victor Hugo spent considerable time while he was writing “Les Miserables.” That evening, when we were in one of the tent meetings, we were impressed with the choice of the Scripture reading, which included the text, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” There were those in that tent meeting who knew well some of the deep miseries of life, and at the same time who now had emerged from the darkness into the light, and whose hope in Christ was secure. The contrast between the story of the novelist, and the promise and assurance of the inspired Word of God under which men are led out of their human miseries into the light and joy of the life that is Christ, was not to be forgotten by us who had seen these reminders on that single day of journeying over the field of

the Mission. Many a home in Belgium today is rejoicing in that hope, because of those who have been willing to put aside the comforts and the allurements of the world, and devote themselves to the spread of the Gospel of the risen Christ, in their purpose to minister to the needs of all those who can be reached.

CHAPTER IX

AMONG THE CHILDREN

In the mellow Belgian twilight, a waving garland of dancing flowers came airily down the wide, quiet streets, where one of the thoroughfares crosses the Rue Américaine in beautiful Brussels.

But these flowers were singing a light caroling song as they came onward through the dusk. There are flowers everywhere in Belgium,—and so also there are children. And these were children, after all, just on the edge of the evening hour of the day, playing their happy games in the otherwise quiet street. I watched them at their play, and to-day I have been thinking of them, as the memory pictures of other children that I saw in Belgium come thronging to my mind.

Far down on the edge of the devastated area of Belgium, a bright-eyed boy ran to us, as we stood beside the utter ruin of an old church, and offered us for sale a German sword. He must have been very young indeed when the war swept over his neighborhood; he was shy and very polite, and not insistent or aggressive. From the time the little fellow began to notice anything very closely, he has never known anything but the wreckage of war to the utmost horizon that his eyes may scan.

One day in Brussels, when I was visiting some of the Mission neighborhoods with Miss Ruth

Tiffany, one of the workers, a bright-faced, neatly dressed little girl ran up to her and caught her hand. Instantly there was a little love feast on the sunshiny street. Then I dropped down on one knee, and let the camera record the picture of the child, because I had learned that while she very much wanted to come to the Mission Sunday-school, yet she was really afraid to do so, because she had been told at home that the missionaries at the school were eating little children. She evidently feels quite safe with them on the open street, but somehow her child mind has been impressed with the tale of their awful wickedness, and while she loves them out in the open, she is afraid to go to their meeting-place, which she regards rather as an eating-place.

My thought leads me across the beautiful city over into a part of it where perhaps the traveler does not often go. It is night, and the streets are filled with a restless crowd. Looming against the sky is the great pile of the Palace of Justice, but on its flank, sloping down a broad hillside, are some of the worst sections of Brussels. Here the Salvation Army does its work.

We climbed the hill through the semi-darkness of one narrow street, where what appeared to be comfortable family groups were seated on the doorsteps, and many children were playing in the streets. But the Salvation Army worker who took us through that shadowed neighborhood told us that nearly all the houses were houses of shame. If that little boy

down near Poel-Capelle had been living, as indeed he was, in the midst of a panorama of devastation, what of these bairns brought up in the devastating haunts of vice? It was not illogical, therefore, that just outside the dance halls along the main thoroughfare of the district, little girls about thirteen or fourteen years of age were standing inviting men into the dance halls. From within the brightly lighted rooms came the sound of jazz music, crashing out into the gloom of the streets, with its allurements for those who were seeking what they supposed were the pleasures of the halls beyond the wide-open entrance doors. And young girls, hardly more than children themselves, were pointing out the way!

I turn from such a picture as this to a little building in Antwerp, that wonderful seaport of the Belgians, where the commerce of a world lies at the great docks, and where the architecture of years gone by has so beautified an altogether impressive city. Yet I pass by the wonderful docks, and the Cathedral and the beautiful boulevards, as I picture Antwerp, to hasten to the Station of the Belgian Gospel Mission where the Thursday School for the children is in session. Here the Rev. Auguste Parmentier, a strong Flemish speaking Belgian preacher, is in charge, and in the children's work he is assisted by Jan Van Wyck, a Hollander, who also preaches at Courtrai and Steene.

"Mr. Parmentier had good preparation for this work of evangelizing in the open air," says Mrs. Norton, "which as American friends can gather, is

not very easy, although we are not always openly opposed. Mr. Parmentier had a genuine old-fashioned conversion. His mother had found the Lord in a tent meeting conducted by Flemish and English evangelists, and her great longing was that one of her boys might become such as were those evangelists, who led her to Christ, and that longing and prayer today is answered.

“At the age of eighteen, Mr. Parmentier was an unsaved youth, but at that time at a Gospel meeting, he was struck down with terrible conviction. He tells us he saw hell open and yawning at his feet, and with tears and sobs was led to the foot of the Cross, where he found peace. Then he commenced with others to hold open air services. He had to work exceedingly hard to help support his widowed mother, but Sundays he was free to give to this work of witnessing. He tells us that usually he would arrive at home at night, his clothing soiled and soaked with dirty water, which had been thrown upon him by opponents of his message.

“His longing to give himself entirely to the work of God became deeper and at last it was made possible for him to have several years of training in a school for evangelists, and then he took a little church. Later on he was sent to Grammont, an industrial center, and was used to build out of practically nothing, a prosperous and flourishing church, but God drew him to our side, soon after our arrival in Belgium. He shared with us a view of Flanders awake and crying for immediate help. We

were needing a pastor for Antwerp, and he was given to the Mission. Today in the Mission's own quarters in Antwerp, in a hall seating some three hundred and fifty people, there is a blessed work of God going on."

Recently a group of Christian brethren from Holland visited the Mission Station at Antwerp, and in co-operation with Mr. Parmentier a week of evangelistic services were held. So telling were the results, and so moved were these brethren from Holland by what they saw and heard, that one of their number, Mr. Stavinga of Bergen, wrote the following for a journal in Holland, "De Amsterdammer":

"How many there were in these meetings who for the first time or in a fuller way than ever before, drank of the living waters, we did not count. God knows them; that is enough. The speakers were so led by the Spirit of God that they had no eyes but for this visible and powerful revelation of God's presence. How then could they count?

"We do not give any more details. We mention these things in order that they may rejoice those who sow and those who harvest. The Flemish people, crushed and beaten down during the war, are beginning to live, and more than this, clearly show signs of a spiritual awakening. There, one does not primarily fight against the Church of Rome, the greatest efforts are bent towards holding up the Christ of the Scriptures.

"From what we heard the Norton Mission has about fifteen posts, in Flanders and Wallonnie, the

headquarters in Brussels are under the direction of Mr. and Mrs. Norton, who in the trenches labored amongst the Belgians, lived with them, and felt a great love in their hearts to this people, spiritually so poor. And now the sun is beginning to shine. In Antwerp the victory has started. We do not doubt that there is more to follow; the beginning of the expected revival was there, thus preceding the revival in England.

“Christians in Holland! What is possible in Belgium, is it impossible in Holland?”

“This American Mission has understood that one cannot content oneself with speaking only once about Jesus Christ. A fixed post, a lighthouse, must be placed as soon as possible where the Gospel has once been preached. Surely we rejoice in the Tent Mission in Holland and in the evangelistic tours in North Holland, but all this is summer work. What do we do with the fruit during the winter?”

“Notwithstanding the greatest discouragements, notwithstanding both hidden and open enmity from more than one source, these brethren persevere in Belgium and the Lord of Heaven will make them succeed, because,—the leaders come together every week to pray, and then go away over Flanders with a desire to build up the Kingdom of God.

“We appreciate every other evangelistic work in Belgium, but we think that this Mission supplies a real need. What has happened in Antwerp will spread from town to town, from village to village, and the blood of the martyrs that has soaked the

soil of Flanders, may win this country for the Lord!"

But to return to the scene that confronted us on the day of our visit to the Thursday School. The happy faced girls and boys are standing about the doorway, some of them pushing their way in and others are already inside, having taken their seats in the orderly array of chairs towards the front of the long narrow hall, or meeting room. It is an eager, frolicking, scampering crowd, as they gather; but at the signal from their leader there is quite as good order immediately secured as there would be in any well-conducted American Sunday-school. Indeed, I thought as I watched the gathering that many schools on this side of the sea or across the Channel might envy the silence and the order, notwithstanding the fact that these Belgian children wear wooden shoes and slip them off, to be placed under the chairs during the session. No American Sunday-school Convention has ever had to discuss, so far as I know, the problem of the wooden shoe! It is a real problem in Belgium. Imagine a bare floor with sixty or seventy pairs of wooden shoes on it, and as many lively children in the chairs, just over those shoes! Well, the Belgians know how to take care of that problem, and they do it very well.

Of course this school is distinctively a Bible school, but many of the methods of the vacation Bible schools, as conducted in America, have been intro-

duced into the schools at Antwerp, Bruges, and Brussels.

After the opening service the children scattered, the boys to long tables at the rear of the hall, and the girls to two or three rooms in the second floor of the building. While I could not understand the language of these young Flemings, I do understand the language of the hammer, jig-saw and plane; so I wandered about among the boys, commending their work, interested in every bit of it, and watched them make boxes, picture frames, and toys, under the instruction of the teachers,—just the very things our boys in America have been learning to do. How those hand jig-saws did buzz through the wood! How eagerly the nails were placed and driven in to make the boxes!

I did not understand the language of the little girls upstairs any better than the language of the boys, and I suppose that I did not understand their hand-language quite so well, for they were busy with the things girls love to do,—making beautiful little baskets, or balls of solid wool, with which children might play, or working out mottoes, or knitting, or doing other similar and welcome tasks. And over them hovered the tactful and cheery-faced instructors, making everything just as plain as could be for these little Flemings who live in a land where some of the most wonderful handwork in all the world is done by the women. Oh, what a contrast to the lives of those poor and uninstructed children of the night!



THE THURSDAY SCHOOL IN ANTWERP
THE THURSDAY SCHOOL IN BRUGES
A THURSDAY SCHOOL GROUP, ANTWERP

At first this school was conducted as a daily Bible school. The families of the five hundred and fifty-seven children who gave their names and addresses in connection with attendance at the school, were visited by the workers, and every family had expressed delight at what was accomplished. Not all the parents are willing to continue to send their children to these schools, and thus religious differences interfere with the attendance. Sometimes the opposition is of a novel character. A woman living next to the Mission house, engaged in that very prevalent occupation in Belgium of washing pavements, disliked the whole enterprise so thoroughly that she showed her feelings by turning the hose on the children one day as they were leaving the Mission premises. The shower bath did not keep them away, for many of the children in these schools come in spite of home discouragements or impromptu shower baths. I felt sorry for two little boys who were looking out from the second story of a house just across the way from the Mission, while the crowd of youngsters was gathering in glee and happy excitement on the pavement as they made their way into the school. The little boys across the street were very well dressed, and seemed to be playing with toys, but they glanced every now and then across the street, and I wonder if it was my imagination that made me feel that their looks were rather wistful!

It was difficult to get away from that beautiful school in Antwerp. At the close of the handwork

period, the children gathered for a closing service,—and how they did sing! With one or two of the workers I passed out through the crowd to the street, and then the youngsters followed us. I really needed seven or eight hands in order to satisfy the little people who crowded around the stranger, who seemed perhaps no longer a stranger to them, and clung to his hands, as we made our way out to the wide street, and to the open square just beyond the Mission.

When the school at Antwerp was started on week-days, it was supposed to be in session for two weeks, from nine to twelve, but it became necessary to conduct two schools, one in the morning and one in the afternoon; and instead of extending for two weeks, it ran for three weeks with an average attendance of about 150. Those of us who are accustomed to the extent of Sunday-schools in America, and to the growing work of week-day Christian instruction, can scarcely realize how completely uninformed are the children in a land like Belgium. One boy was asked, "Who is Jesus?" He answered readily enough, "Jesus is a little girl." It is not hard to account for his answer when one understands that so many parents in Belgium call any dear little child "a little Jesus."

When one of the workers was speaking to the children about the Bible, some of them thought he meant "marbles," for the word "bible" and the word "billes" sound much alike when pronounced by a Belgian. Marbles appears to be just as popular a

game in Belgium as it is in America, for one of the little chaps in the Sunday-school who displayed an unusually good collection of reward cards for the reciting of Scripture verses, under the questioning of his teacher explained that he had won these cards playing marbles! Juvenile inventive genius is not confined to the North American continent, by any means.

In the absence of a knowledge of the Bible there is naturally the necessity in all these schools for laying the simplest foundations of Bible knowledge and of applied Christian teaching. One girl frankly could not see the wrong in copying others' papers during an examination for the Sunday-school children. The moral problem involved was fully explained to her, and yet she really could not see why there was anything wrong about it. Sometimes in trying to locate a member of the school who had not been present for a Sunday or two, the workers realize with as much embarrassment as one might feel in China, that if a neighborhood does not want one of its inhabitants to be found, he is not at home! Superstition and suspicion are neighborhood elements that need to be overcome by the actual life and work of the missionaries. That this has been done to such a wonderful degree in so many centres in Belgium, in the work of the Belgian Gospel Mission, is a remarkable testimony to the loving hand of God upon that work.

Not far from the Mission center in Brussels is a short and crowded tenement street called Rue de la

Betterave, which means the "street of the beet." The camera, and the presence of a stranger standing at the head of that short street one day, very quickly brought a crowd of young and old who lined themselves up in a laughing, eager and highly mixed group across the street where they would be sure to be in the picture. No urging was needed. They just poured out of the houses on either side, and hastened to get a place. What faces were in that crowd! How the ravages of war and the heavy toil of reconstruction days have made the women of Belgium look old! Here was a young man dreadfully crippled, just in the foreground of the picture, carefully held up by a woman who seemed to be caring for him with tender care. I had just come from a little visit to a family in one of the tenements, living in a clean, bright room. A boy in that family had walked two miles to the Thursday school of the Mission station in Brussels, carrying his little sister on his back, in order that she might get to the school. That family has really been reached by the Mission and so have many other families, too; but in the crowd spread out across the narrow street there were so many who have never yet been reached! And that crowd is simply typical of the crowds everywhere, not only in the big cities, but in the smaller and larger towns.

This grouping of personal impressions is not intended to be a systematic account of the work of the Belgian Gospel Mission among the children. The many tent meetings for children during the Summer

time would reveal statistics that would tremendously encourage those who are deeply interested in the furthering of the Gospel in that land. The Mission is conducting nine Sunday-schools, and three week-day Bible Schools, commonly called over there the Thursday Schools. The workers are becoming trained in many phases of Sunday-school work, and so far as is practicable, or desirable, the Sunday-schools, the week-day Bible Schools, and the meetings for children in the great tents, are planned on the basis of what has been learned in lands where the Sunday-school and other phases of work for children have been extensively developed.

Mr. Philip E. Howard, Jr., who, with his wife, joined the Mission in 1922, is a grandson of Henry Clay Trumbull, who was a pioneer American Sunday-school leader, distinguished writer, explorer and editor. Mr. Howard directs the Brussels Sunday-school, assisted by Miss Gustavine Castiaux, who is one of the efficient office staff of the Mission. In close co-operation with him in this department of the work is Mr. Philemon Ringoir, who in addition to his many duties as overseer of Mission property, has charge of the Sunday-school at Warquignies.

It was not my privilege to see the Thursday School or the Sunday-school actually in session in Brussels, because of visits to other parts of the country at the very time when I might have seen these schools. I was privileged, however, to see the Sunday-schools in session at Bruges and at Antwerp, although I did not see the Thursday School at Bruges, but was able

to observe the excellent rooms that are provided in the Mission building and the appliances arranged there for the children's work. There is undoubtedly many a Sunday-school in America that would be rejoiced to undertake the support of a school in the Belgian Gospel Mission, supplying the school with needed printed material, with adequate furnishings, and with whatever may be required for the material needs.

If you really want to hear children and grown folks sing, go to Belgium. The strong, vigorous Flemish and the graceful French are singing languages. Given either of these languages and hymns that are not only new to the children in their music, but marvelously new in the wonderful words of life, and you have a combination that is simply thrilling to the listener from a far land.

We had attended the morning session of the little school at Bruges in the comfortable, well-ordered room where the children meet. We had observed how the exercises were conducted, and we had heard the Gospel story told with vivid word-pictures by one of the Flemish-speaking workers. A number of hymns were sung, but I think we can never forget the moment when the dear children in that school and the devoted Mission workers joined in singing "Shall We Gather at the River?" There in that ancient city of Bruges, in the heart of an old palace, a part of which constitutes the Mission premises, and in the very midst of the scenes made terribly memorable by the days of the Inquisition; there, in

that city which was notable for its pomp and its power in the old days of the proud civic position of such places as Bruges, Ghent, Ypres, Antwerp, Brussels; there, in the midst of all this, these happy-faced Belgian children were singing "Shall We Gather at the River?" Our hearts echoed the query of that song with the deep and joyous assurance, "Indeed, indeed you shall."

You should have heard the children come out so strongly and beautifully on the words "*Aan de zilveren, zilveren stroomen*"! Oh, that silver stream toward which our hearts turn with such longing! The children caroling in the twilight, in the Brussels street, seemed so blithe and unconcerned, and there are thousands upon thousands like them in Belgium. How much will they ever know about the "*zilveren stroomen*"? Many, many of them never will,—unless you care enough.

CHAPTER X

THE WORK FOR WOMEN

The Mission has established a special work for women. This takes the form of Bible classes for women at various centers, and a special ministry of visitation for personal work among the women of many neighborhoods.

The various stations conduct the work under the general direction of Miss May B. White, from the Brussels headquarters, and it is a multiplied ministry indeed, for the women have much need of sisterly encouragement, and evangelistic approach, and instruction in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus.

Miss White is the pioneer co-worker in the Mission, being with the Nortons a year or more before the close of the war work, and in charge of the offices in London. When the war was over she accompanied the evangelists to Belgium, embarking gladly upon the large enterprise of faith which they were undertaking.

Her father, at one time a beloved and revered figure on the Keswick platform, was Surgeon Major White, and his daughter was brought up in the atmosphere of such a home. Her sister married J. Martin Cleaver, who was one of the founders of the Egypt General Mission, and of him Dr. J. Stuart Holden has said that he was perhaps the man of holiest life whom he ever knew. This man of God,

who early went to be with his Lord, had the joy of influencing his sister-in-law, May White, to accompany others to the mission field of Egypt. She had already been greatly used of God with her singing voice and personal testimony, in England. Her service in Egypt, however, was curtailed after but a few years of service, because of the impossibility of her adapting herself to the fierce heat of that African climate, and she returned again to England. Then came on the war, and she gave herself to work in hospitals, which her excellent knowledge of the French language enabled her to perform. In ministering to the Belgian soldiers she came into touch with the Nortons' work.

In Belgium, it is not desirable for the men workers to give much attention to the opportunities for evangelistic work among the women of various communities. Slanderous tongues wag easily in these communities. Indeed, there is even a prejudice among some of the Belgian Christians against any work among the women, but this does not seriously affect the efforts of the Mission. Miss White, even before she came to Belgium, had learned much about the possibility of women's work, through information given her by one of the leaders of the Plymouth Brethren, Mr. W. J. Nock, who has lived there for about thirty years.

In Miss White's classes, Bible study is conducted under a course prepared by her, and in this the women are deeply interested. Much of the work is done from Bible charts, while the women take notes

and are enthusiastic in their interest, and in their questions. It is the leader's hope that out of these classes will come women workers to share in the extension of the work.

Once a month in Brussels the women hold a missionary prayer-meeting, and they decided that they would like to have their own evangelist in the Congo. This group is made up mostly of girls and women who work in shops in the city.

Miss Elsie M. Hopkins, an American girl of consecrated ability in the Lord's work, who was in direct charge of the clerical staff of the Mission, and of reports, accounting, and current finances for all the stations, conducted a most interesting Bible Class from week to week in Antwerp for English-speaking women, until family obligations called her home to America.

In Dour and Warquignies, once every two weeks, about twenty women gather on Friday night for Bible study under Mr. and Mrs. Neusy, the latter of whom visits them frequently. These visits are not merely incidental calls, but a single visit may take a full afternoon, for the women enjoy talking with the visitors, and they like to discuss the events of the war and all the present-day matters connected with their household.

In January, 1920, attracted by a poster announcement, a young girl named Anne Marie De Pooter attended a conference held in Brussels by Pastor Saillens of Paris, who had been conducting some evangelistic meetings for the Belgian Gospel Mis-

sion. She had no thought of listening to the Gospel message in particular, but had heard that the preacher used beautiful language. She did not know that such a book as the Bible existed, although she was twenty-one years old. When Pastor Saillens began his message, it seemed as if a new world was opened up to her. The evangelist said exactly what she had been longing to hear.

“The following day I went to my workshop and worked with renewed vigour. The other workers asked me whether the conference had pleased me. ‘Yes,’ I replied, but added nothing more. However, the work hours were over; it was evening, and unconsciously I returned to the Gospel Hall. Why? I know I was then driven by the Holy Spirit. That evening again I thought it was all very beautiful, and yet as the previous evening, once I had left the hall I forgot all about it, and thought again about my work. Oh! how great seemed the strength that I possessed that night! It seemed as though I could lift the world . . . and yet, all of a sudden, and I do not know how it came, I had such a feeling of weakness. In a moment of time I realized that in spite of all I might do, all the efforts I could make, it would ever only be as the trembling of a little fish in the immense ocean. And I felt that truly there was only one Source of strength,—God. It is impossible to put into words what one feels in such a moment. I was only a step from home then. I went in and without taking time to take my coat off, I signed the decision card. It was then ten P. M.

I did not know Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour then, but He had revealed Himself to me as the God Almighty, Whose is the power and glory for ever and ever. And it was before Him that I knelt with all my heart and soul. And I still praise him that he revealed himself to me that night with such power. Truly the Lord is mighty!

“At the workshop I kept quiet. I said nothing about the change that had taken place in my heart. Why should I speak about it? That evening I went again to the hall. I bought a Bible, and in reading this, two verses struck me: John 4:24,—‘God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.’

“‘I want to worship like that,’ I said to myself, and there and then knelt down to ask the Lord to give me that grace. The other verse was Luke 16:16,—‘The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.’

“‘Yes, and I want to get into it, too,’ I said, and I started to read my Bible morning, noon, and evening. I lived only for the Word. Truly everything had changed. I took no more interest in my work. I did not read the Bible in order to tell others about it, but out of real hunger. I wanted to know God. A fortnight afterwards, I learned to know the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour.

“It was at noon, and as I was doing some shopping at the Galerie du Roi (Brussels) I suddenly thought of a certain sin. And I blushed out of

shame when some inward voice said to me: 'Has not the Lord Jesus Christ borne all those sins for you? This thought brought peace in my soul, and from that moment I have never doubted another instant, that 'Now there is no more condemnation' for me, for no one shall ever draw me out of Jesus' hand, for he is my Saviour.

"And since this time he has led me and given me more and more light. He has not abandoned me one single moment. He has truly been 'Immanuel' for me. I have not only proved his faithfulness, but his tenderness. Truly, our God is a God who is worthy to be trusted. Hence, I have but one desire: 'that I may count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.'"

Miss DePooter went to the Bible School for two years' study, and has had one year of practical work. She is now working at the Dour Station, and this is by no means an easy field. Miss DePooter does anything that she can to help;—she will scrub, cook, wash, and in every way is a true missionary among the women of that neighborhood. She is always cheery, and every one is glad to see her. She thus writes of some of the incidents in her work:

"We have visited old Philomène again, whose life is an inspiration to all the Brethren and she gave us her testimony. We saw that indeed all that has been said about her is true. She lives alone in a big house, but she says she is never alone. Her neighbors are surprised that she is not afraid to be left

alone like that, but she says, I am not alone, for the Lord surrounds me and protects me always. When I come home from the meetings I go to bed, having no anxiety. I talk to the Lord Jesus Christ as I do with you. One can see that this dear woman truly lives in a constant communion with her Lord. 'I have just been to fetch some water,' she said, 'and I sang all the way: "Lord, Thy presence is the source of all joy."' Her neighbors have come to the conclusion that she must be mad, but that does not hinder her. This woman cannot read the Bible herself, and it has to be read to her by friends.

"Then we visited another woman, who had just lost a boy of fifteen. This woman was perfectly calm, and said to us: 'Oh! if the Lord did not sustain me, who is there besides Him who could?' Her husband who was with her told us that he had been a terrible man and a strong drinker, but that since he knew Jesus as his Saviour, he was another man. 'I only regret that I have not known Him twenty years sooner,' he said. Many people have already told me how they regretted not to have known the Truth sooner, and we frequently see men who were cruel husbands, absolutely changed and now models of patience, kindness. Another lady told me the story of a man who used to spend all he earned in drink, and was very violent with his wife, so that she and his children had to run away from him when he came home. He was converted, and now it is he who is being persecuted, as his wife has not accepted the Saviour and instead of rejoicing in the

change wrought in him, she tries to stop him and puts obstacles in his way. This man is a miner, and during his work he often gathers some friends together in the mine, and there they have a little prayer-meeting and a spiritual talk. Truly we see God at work here and gathering out His own, in spite of all opposition and difficulty."

Everywhere one comes upon incidents concerning the faithfulness and self-sacrifice of the Belgian women who have come out into the light of a pure Christian faith, or who are seeking to do so. Miss Deneker, in charge of the women's work centering in Bruges, tells of one woman who was warned against the "mad folk" in the Mission meetings, but came in one night, and was converted. Later, she became very ill and she sent for her parents, who refused to come unless she would promise never to go to the meetings again, but this she would not do.

One woman, with no less than sixteen children, the youngest of whom was two years of age, and who had to be up by three o'clock in the morning in order to get her day's work done, said, "I am so happy. God has always given me everything I need." She does her own housework, and besides that takes in other work. She is always cheerful, though she never makes very much in money by what she does. For a little less than two inches of lace, she receives one franc and twenty-five centimes from the dealers, and the dealers sell the product for three and one-half to four francs, the women supplying their own thread. In the country, the

women adopt various ways of helping out in the household expenses, sometimes by making gloves or lace, and they, of course, work in the fields.

The bondage under which so many women live in Belgium is illustrated by many an incident gathered from the experience of all the field workers, no matter in what section of the country the work is carried on. Mr. M— writes: "You can hardly picture to yourself the darkness of these places and the ignorance of the people. But praise His Name, in many of these places I have had the opportunity to speak of the Light of the world, which is Jesus Christ.

"One day I came on a farm, where I was welcomed by a dog almost as big as I am myself, barking furiously, and had it not been for the farmer, who quickly caught the dog, I think he would have experimented how strong my trousers were. But God's ways are wonderful, and 'all things work together for good,' so the man invited me to sit down a while. I took a seat near an old woman of eighty-seven, the mother of the farmer. We had not talked very long, but our conversation turned to the eternal things. The old woman said to me, 'Oh, it is all very nice, but when you have worked all your life, to honestly earn your living, and you have done all you can, you people come and make us afraid speaking about purgatory, where we must burn so many years to be fit to go to heaven.' And she sighed. 'Of course,' I replied to her, 'without purgatory, that priest of yours does not manage to get

the money you earned with so much difficulty and hard work. It is quite another thing,' I told her, 'with the Lord Jesus. He never mentioned money. His purpose was not to buy men for His Kingdom. He came to bring the Gospel to the poor, and to convert sinners from their sins. When He healed any one, physically or spiritually, all He said was, "Go and sin no more." And if you, dear sister, go to Jesus with all your sins, He will hear you and forgive your sins, and what I know is that you will safely reach Heaven, without purgatory, for our Lord said, "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out."'

"'Oh, sir,' she said to me, 'I would so love to go to heaven; don't you think the priest could stop my going there?' 'Do you think the priest is master of heaven?' I asked her. 'Well, I suppose not, but he does know more than we do.' 'The Lord Jesus does not speak of those "who know much" as having any more privileges than others, dear sister. He says, "He that believeth in Me hath life everlasting." Salvation is a gift of God that you get free. You could not buy it,' I told her.

"The poor woman was so touched and said, 'Well, sir, that is lovely what you told me there. If the priest of our village spoke like that to the people, the world would change. I am so glad you have come. Come back soon.' The farmer said to me, 'You are welcome.' He bought a calendar and a New Testament. And with a prayer in my heart

that God would bless those people and give them light, I left the farmhouse and went on my way."

"The prevailing conditions among large numbers of womenkind in Belgium are noteworthily pitiful," writes a woman who has been much among them. "Upon one hand there are those (the larger majority they are) who are crushed under merciless toil, cultivating the fields, aiding in the husband's business, vending vegetables, flowers or newspapers on the streets, laundering and cleaning, as well as doing their own housework and mothering the rising generation. An animal strength and service is required of them, therefore it is not strange that many quickly descend to a condition that is heart-breaking.

"They have been taught so long that 'the end justifies the means,' that if the keeping together of body and soul, or the care of her brood suggest to a woman a life of shame there is little to hold her back. Many seem so completely to have missed or lost chastity that there is little sense of moral values, and it is with many plain unmoralness rather than conscious immorality.

"Contrasted with these as to living conditions are the women who live in gay leisure and luxury, 'les dames du monde,' indulging in every whim of fashion, as well as the vices of civilization that are rampant in large cosmopolitan centers. The moral life among these, though differently expressed, is equally if not more, debased. There is little pure affection or homelife in this type of society.

"These facts but prove the often reiterated state-

ments of missionaries of all the world, that it is the women of Bible-less and Gospel-less lands who bear the brunt of the sin and suffering of the resultant spiritual darkness."

Mrs. Norton has told the story of one young girl who was in correspondence with her during the war as a result of the work among the soldiers:

"One Sunday recently a young woman came to see me, a girl with whom I had corresponded during the war, but her name, Aline D'Amour, meant little to me in those days, save as being the name of a girl who seemed so firmly entrenched in her superstitious belief that only miraculous grace could ever pierce her false repose. She lived in the town of Popeinghe, which was constantly bombarded by the Germans. One day as she was leaving her convent school, hastening out of the city to escape the bombardment, she met a Canadian soldier, who asked of her news concerning his battery, which, he had been informed, was stationed in the town.

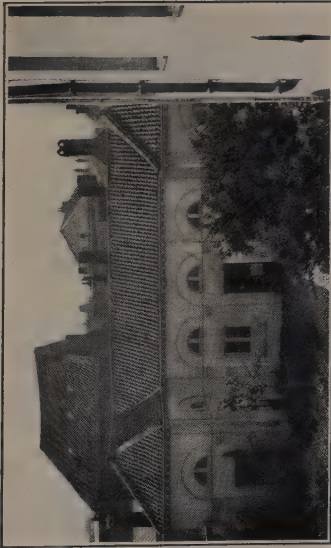
"She could tell him but little, but as he was lost for the time, she took him back to her mother's home, where he remained until he could rejoin his battery. His gratitude for the family's kindness was great, and he returned often to pay his respects and also wrote to his mother across the sea, recounting the sympathy with which he had been surrounded while in this Belgian home. His mother's heart was touched, and she wrote to me, asking me to send Aline a Testament and to speak to her of Christ. I know now that all my letters reached her, as well as

the little books I enclosed, but she never read the books. She was too prejudiced against them. But at the same time something led her to preserve them. This Sunday in Brussels she told me how gently and truly the Holy Spirit dealt with her in the months that followed.

“The war ended, something compelled her to come to Brussels and seek business employment. She did not know why she seemed so driven, but she came, and later her sister followed and they entered upon a business career. Of course it was only natural to come and see us here in the Mission, and little by little she began to frequent the Sunday and week-day meetings. Then one day in an interview I asked her point-blank if she knew Christ as Saviour, and she told me ‘No,’ and that she intended never to change her own religion, which I had reason to believe was only a religion, and not a life that she was enjoying.

“But she went home to her room, haunted with the question that had been put to her, and after two days reading the New Testament she had in her possession, she came into simple faith in Christ, and found him ‘Whom to know is life eternal.’

“Then she returned again to our meetings, with what different zest! Now, she is declaring herself publicly, and, as it is a year since her conversion, she intends continuing a few months longer in business, and then, if the Lord leads, at the beginning of the next fall term, she expects to enter the Bible School and prepare herself for Christian work. Her



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sister, whom she has led to Christ, is also desirous of so doing, but it remains to be seen whether her health will permit."

This young girl, at the time of my visit in Belgium, was a student in the Bible School, and an efficient helper in the office of the Mission, while the sister was the visiting nurse of the church assembly in Brussels. Aline has learned to speak English very well, and interpreted for me on more than one occasion, when I was addressing meetings. Her interpretation was anything but mechanical, but that of one who loves the Truth the speaker was endeavoring to express. Glance for a moment, if you will, at Aline D'Amour's report of the 12th of November, 1922, concerning some of the work in which she had been engaged.

"In these last few weeks the Lord has blessed me in a most remarkable way. More than ever during the last year I enjoy the instruction at school and feel that the Lord is working in me at present, although Satan also was more on my side than usual, and did all he could to make the study of the Word hard to me.

"These last months I visited the women in Ath once a week. In that town the Lord has done wonders, and most of these women were saved during the tent campaign last summer. They had come to the tent by curiosity, and there found their Saviour and life. Ten days ago a new hall was opened there and it has been a most encouraging day.

"With regard to the children's work in Antwerp

several new children were reached, and especially on Thursday, when some children come who cannot come to Sunday-school. I went to Flanders (Yperen) again to visit my dear parents, and just then a Catholic missionary had the first open-air meeting out there. It is most certainly a new struggle against the preaching of the Truth.

“In the beginning of this week we had the great privilege of having some special conferences on the subject of our Lord’s return, and the preacher, Mr. John de Heer, explained the Scriptures in a most marvelous way to us, and every one, I know, was greatly strengthened and rejoiced. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. Praise and glory to our precious and great Lord.”

Sitting one day in the main office of the Mission, Jeanne Baert told me her story. She is a young girl not much over twenty years of age, who can speak four languages well. There was no need of an interpreter during our conversation, either of the language itself, for she spoke excellent English; nor of the significance of her story, for her face, and her efficient work in the Mission as a stenographer and helper in every way had already been known to me.

She was born and brought up a real Roman Catholic, in Catholic institutions so far as her schooling went, understanding the full round of mass, confession, and required work. During her young girlhood, there was one great question in her mind, “Why am I here on earth?” She never seemed to

be able to answer it satisfactorily. The Church was the center of her thoughts, and in 1913 during a great storm, when she was thirteen years old, she hid herself in the Church, saying that if she must die she would rather die there than in any other place. But she had no real peace in her soul. In 1914, she left home and went to live with her grandmother, and at that time, during a terrific bombardment of Antwerp, they followed with a part of the escaping crowd to the river, then to Ostend, and almost before they knew where they were going, they found themselves in England as refugees.

Jeanne lived in a small place called Leatherhead. She went to school there, and she felt sorry for the folks around her, because she was sure they were lost, since they were not Catholics. However, she watched and studied, and after a year went to Clark's Business College in London. There she resided in a boarding house, where one of the daughters of the household led an evil life. Jeanne felt herself in danger there, and visited a priest in Mildmay for advice. She found no satisfaction, and when, one day, a teacher took her to a Plymouth Brothers' meeting in Wellington, she heard what seemed to her a wonderful message of Truth. She began to attend Chapel in Ashstead, walking three miles each way twice on Sunday.

On a certain snowy day, her mother hid Jeanne's coat in order to prevent her from going, but she caught up a coat belonging to one of her brothers, and went out into the storm. She was not allowed

to read her Bible at home, so, every evening, she took the Book to the forest near by until dark, studying two or three hours every day. She made outlines of sermons that she heard, and after a time, she decided that she must be baptized. She told me that she came out of the Roman Catholic Church, because she had learned what was meant by justification by faith.

There was no encouragement for her at home. She would return from the meetings, and find her people playing cards on Sunday night; but after a time they permitted her to read aloud from her Bible to them, and at last this developed into regular Bible study.

Soon after the Armistice, the family returned to Antwerp, and then Jeanne asked herself in her loneliness in her home city, "Have I done all this study for nothing?" She looked up the addresses of the few Protestant churches in the neighborhood, but found one after another closed. She could not even get on the track of the persons who had attended the church nearest her home, and she did not know a single true Christian. A little boy whom she met said that he knew a Christian family, to which he guided her, and thus she got into touch with a Dutch Reformed congregation. Mr. Nock told Mr. Norton about Jeanne Baert, and upon meeting her, he invited her to take up work in the Bible School.

Miss Baert told me that her family is now converted, and when I asked her about their circumstances, she said that everything,—home, property,

everything,—was now gone as a result of the war, but all were very happy in their new-found faith.

In one of her reports concerning her work, Miss Baert writes: "I have recently had word from Mrs. Norton telling me that it was the desire of the girls of your class to help toward my support in the work of the Belgian Gospel Mission and I was greatly touched as I read it. As I think of the prayers, and the interest that those girls across the ocean will henceforth have in the little portion of work that I am allowed to do for the Master in this needy land, I cannot but lift up my heart in praise and gratitude to God, and say: How blessed is the tie that binds the hearts of his children all over the world! Does it not testify to the greatness of our Saviour and the power of his glorious Gospel?"

"Truly the Lord has exceedingly blessed me, and as I learned of this another sign of his care and goodness, I had to stand still a while and retrace in wonder and love 'all the way that He has led me.' But in truth I must say that the greatest of all blessings and privileges is the *call* to labor in the Belgian Gospel Mission. Never have I realized what a tremendous privilege it is to be a co-laborer in this great work, as I do now. And how deeply I am convinced now of this call. The Lord has made it unmistakably clear to me that this is the place where he wills that I should be, and is there any greater joy on earth than to be in his will? Is anything equal to the joy of that intimate fellowship and communion with the Lord, and the realization of the pres-

ence of the Holy Spirit, which can only be felt in the full sense, if one is absolutely yielded to him, and in the place that he has appointed for us.

“Then first, we can sing ‘Thou sweet beloved Will of God,’ for *then* we know and taste that the Lord is good, and whatever we have given up for him, he a hundredfold rewards. In all humility I can say that this has been my experience these last months, and now I begin to understand some of the Lord’s dealings with me when I was still younger. Now I see why he taught me so many hard lessons, the reason for which I could not see at the time. Now I see that it was in his plan to call me to his work, and he was simply training me. *But* how ungrateful I have been, and how slow to grasp his intentions, and how little I have hitherto valued the privilege of working in his service. Why hasn’t he rejected me long ago?

“My Sunday morning class of girls is going on well, and two new girls joined the class lately. I am thankful to say that I believe the Lord is speaking earnestly to several of them. The spirit among them is beautiful, but I long for more. I want to see some of them, no! all of them (shall we limit his power?) come out and take a definite stand for Christ. These girls are very young and the world is very attractive to them, but pray with me that they may come to a realization of the emptiness and vanity of all that the world offers, and that they may choose to serve God. I had these girls home a fortnight ago, and one of them, ■ dear young girl, who

is just now finishing her normal school, told me that she had given her heart to Jesus, and hopes some day to join some Mission and give her life to Christian work."

One of the women whose life is typical of that of so many in Belgium, I met at the headquarters of the Mission, Mrs. Bandelier Piérard. She was born in Switzerland, and her school-girl life was spent there. She went to England to act as a governess when she was twenty years old, and remained there six years, but she was not a Christian, and does not even know what religion was professed by the family in which she lived. She met a friend who took her to a French Mission in Soho Square, London, and also to some Salvation Army meetings. She was searching for she knew not what. Her conversion seems to have been gradual. Conviction concerning sin, and her Saviour, came to her slowly, but nevertheless, surely. In London she met the man who became her husband, who was at that time preaching the Gospel in the London streets, in the French quarter. He invited her to his meetings, and in less than a year they were married, and they remained in London for a year longer, where he was working for the Suchard concern, the maker of chocolate.

He returned to Belgium to preach the Gospel, and began his missionary work near Brussels. After he had spent about five years in Londonburg, he finally came to Podoique.

Under Monsieur Piérard's ministry, some twenty persons were baptized during the war. His family

suffered much privation; they lived mostly on black bread, and sometimes they had a little bacon, though not every week. As Madame Piérard said to me, "We did not have enough to live on, and we had too much on which to die," with their family of seven children, suffering constant privation, and yet managing to exist.

Just after the Armistice, her husband had come in from a meeting and, unafraid, had picked up two hand-grenades, at the scene of an ammunition dump explosion. He showed these grenades to the family, and then laid them up on a shelf out of the reach of the children.

When he was about to leave for his afternoon meeting, he thought it better to put the grenades still farther into the background, and in order to show that they were really harmless, he took one down and scratched the dirt away from a part of it with a knitting needle. His wife warned him, and stepped into the next room for a moment, when suddenly the grenade exploded, with a terrific crash. There were six children in the room at the time, but not one was hurt. Monsieur Piérard's right hand was blown off, his face was badly cut with splinters, a piece of the grenade was sent by the explosion through his stomach, and he died at once. Then, as Madame Piérard told me the story, she cried, "Oh, the night I had! I was saved, as a Christian, but I was not surrendered. After that night, however, I troubled no more. I put everything in the Lord's

hands, and read John 15, especially the text, "As my Father hath loved me, so have I loved you."

I asked Madame Piérard how she had been making out since her husband's death, with the seven children to care for. She smiled and said, "Why, the Lord has provided. Some days we have had no food in the house for the next day, but the Lord has always provided."

"Can you do any work?" I asked.

"Not very much," she said, "with seven children to care for. I cannot do much work to earn money, but," and then that same happy smile on her face came again, "the Lord has provided, day by day, and I know He will provide so that I may bring up these children."

This woman of fine personality, and quiet face, has taken up her burden with simplicity and earnestness, and not only testifies by her life to her faith, but she has opened her home for little meetings in her neighborhood. Through her ministry, so far as she is able to do anything outside of her home, others are learning what the Gospel means.

Two large volumes have been issued by the Belgian government, fully illustrated, to show the industrial devastation wrought by the war, and the beginnings of recovery from the war-time wreckage. No one could possibly produce an adequate book on the devastation in human life as a result of the war, but there are open books of human life on every hand, as one moves about among the people, and meets such women as Madame Piérard. It is among

such people as this, that the work of the Belgian Gospel Mission has met with marvelous encouragement in spite of opposition, and is fulfilling its task by leading many into the light of the true life in Christ. Because of this, many a name will appear, not in public documents, but in the Lamb's Book of Life.

"While visiting in Braine-le-Comte about two weeks ago," wrote Miss White, "a woman said she would like to ask me a question—something she could not understand. I invited her to put her question, thinking it would be on the subject of something she had read in the Testament, perhaps, and could not understand, and this is what she asked me,—'Mademoiselle, why did you wait so long to come to us?'"

"Do you mean, why did we not come before the War? I don't think we should have had such a good reception before the War. The War has done much to open Belgium to the Gospel."

"I don't mean before the War. I mean when we were young. Why did you let us grow up in ignorance; why did you let the old people die without hearing? I know that Belgium is not the only country in the world, but why did you leave Belgium out?"

"With tears in my heart, and in my eyes, I had to confess with shame that we were guilty before God. We had had the Light so long, and we had never shared our Light with these people!"

CHAPTER XI

THE BIBLE INSTITUTES

One of the wise principles of operation upon which the Belgian Gospel Mission was founded was the full recognition of the need of training local workers. There was at the beginning, and doubtless will be, the need for bringing in workers from other lands, because of special fitness for specific tasks, but the Mission is endeavoring to reduce as much as possible the necessity for this at every point, and to train the Belgian converts themselves, not only for work in their own land, but in looking towards special service in mission fields, particularly in the Congo, in which all Belgians are interested.

As a fundamental means for such training, in 1919 the Mission opened an institute, "L'Institut Biblique de la Mission Belge Evangélique." The school began with six students and one teacher, the Rev. Donald G. Barnhouse, a young American who joined the staff of the Mission upon his release from American army service, and who did pioneer service in the first years of the work, and who is still engaged in evangelization in another section of the European field. The "student body" was made up of five demobilized soldiers, and one young woman. The few workers in the Mission were praying then that there might be ten stations established within the year where the Gospel should be

preached, but in order to do that, it would be necessary to train ten workers. Yet, before the year was over, work was in progress in nine of ten stations, and by the beginning of the winter term in January, there were nine students in the school. In April, there were twenty-one students, and shortly after that, twenty-four. In the spring of that year, the students were giving voice to the result of their musical training under Mrs. Norton, when they sang a hymn that is gloriously sung now wherever the Mission is doing its work,—“*Jusqu'à la mort, C'est notre cri de guerre*”; the chorus of which literally translated reads: “‘Until death,’ that is our battle cry; the free cry of a redeemed people. And until death we will have for our banner Thy blood-stained Cross, oh, thou resurrected Christ.”

Mrs. Norton has told of the first class that was graduated from this Bible School, after a two-year course,—“The six sat in front of us, four young men, two young women. After the hymn and opening prayer Mlle. V—, who had been chosen of the two young women to speak for the women students, arose.

“We knew something of what God had done for her in these two years, but had not known all until that moment. When she first came to us, her mother (the wife of a Baptist pastor near Charleroi) had come with her to beseech our prayers for this her daughter, Deborah, that her tongue might be unloosed, that her excessive shyness might be overcome, and that she might not belie the name

that had been given her. And there she stood before us that night, her two years of student life behind her, and the message she gave to us fearlessly, clearly, beautifully, was the rallying cry of a real Deborah. She sketched the history of the two years' experience,—how she had come to know herself through the Word of God, and she had found for herself the joy of doing without legitimate things for the greater glory of her Master. Then she unrolled her hopes for the future for those who were now setting forth upon their lifetime of service for the Master. And it was a call to battle that she voiced!

“When she had resumed her seat there was another hymn, and then Mr. Kerremans, speaking for the men, mounted to the platform. He could have, he said, but one message on that occasion, and that was to trace the way by which God had led him to that moment wherein he found himself. He said very truly that he was speaking for most of the men in the Bible School, as he told how he had been led to Christ by a copy of the Word of God given him during the war—for that, too, was the history of most of the men students. He told how, the war over, he came back to Brussels, and how difficult he found it to continue in his business career.

“‘So great was the anger and disgust of my employers,’ he recounted, ‘as they saw me reading the Word of God on their premises, that when reverses came to them they blamed it upon me and that pernicious habit that I had of reading the Bible, and

had a priest come to bless the place and counteract the evil influence.' So he was really pushed out into God's work.

"This student-graduate is planning to go to the Congo if his health will permit. Whether he will be able to go remains to be seen, for the last time he was wounded in the war one of the vertebrae in his spine was shattered. He has told us himself that as he fell he watched his hand slowly turning white and said to himself, 'This must be death,' and his first thought was of the New Testament that had been given him. He begged a companion to reach it for him. His conversion followed afterwards.

"When Mr. Kerremans had sat down, it was time for the presentation of the diplomas. My husband arises and takes from the table a little basket containing six small white rolls, tied conventionally with white ribbon. He fumbles among them for a moment, and then finding what he seeks he looks out across the audience. His interpreter is by his side.

" 'Friends,' he says, 'we have come to the end of the second year of the Bible School. Our first graduating class, of six members, are about to receive their diplomas. It is with deepest thankfulness to God that we approach this moment, and we invoke your prayers for blessing upon them as they go forth.

" 'I know what is the immemorial custom regarding diplomas,—that the young women should be given theirs first. But I am going to ask to be per-



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mitted to depart from this time-honored custom for this occasion. There sits before us, among the six who compose this graduating class, a young man. Six years ago I met him on the streets of London and put a Gospel into his hand. As he read it he found Christ and became an apostle to his comrades, whom he led to profess Christ as their Saviour by the hundreds. Through mud and rain, in the cold of winter and the heat of summer, he patrolled the trenches which were his parish, bringing men to the knowledge of Christ. That man, weakened by the war, his health shattered by the last terrible offensive, in which he suffered two gas attacks, has nevertheless finished his two years in the Bible School, and is to-night to receive his diploma. Peter Van Koeckhoven, will you come forward and receive the first diploma issued by the Bible Institute of Belgium?"

"Then one after another were presented, and Mr. Van Steenberghe closed with a touching appeal to those who had perhaps been resisting the call of God for service in Belgium, and a prayer."

And now at the time of this writing, there are two Bible Institutes under the care of the Mission, one for the French-speaking, and the other for the Flemish-speaking workers. The Rev. Henry K. Bentley, who is in charge of the French-speaking school, and Mr. J. Knecht, in charge of the Flemish-speaking school, have with the co-operation of the leaders of the Mission, worked out a fully coordinated course of study for the workers, in prep-

aration for colportage, public speaking in the delivery of the Gospel Message, and a study of the field itself, with the needs of the people kept prominently in mind. Mr. Bentley is assisted by Philip E. Howard, Jr., who is a University of Pennsylvania graduate, and was a student in the National Bible Institute, Philadelphia, and who, with his wife, joined the Mission in the summer of 1922. Mr. Knecht is assisted by Mr. A. C. Van Puffelen, a Hollander, who is a graduate of the Moody Bible Institute.

“Mr. Bentley’s life is bound up with the romance of missions,” writes Mrs. Norton. “His father, W. Holman Bentley, was one of the pioneers of the Baptist missionary work in the Belgian Congo, going out in 1879 immediately after Stanley had declared the country open for foreign effort. He found, of course, no written language. The task of reducing it to writing devolved upon him, and with the collaboration of the other missionaries, he set about producing a dictionary and grammar. When these were completed, with the knowledge of the language thus gained, he undertook the great task of translating the Bible into the language spoken in the most important districts. He finished the New Testament, and part of the Old, when he was called Home to higher service. The services of the pioneer missionary had such value in the eyes of the Belgian officials that he was given the decoration of ‘Chevalier de l’ordre de Léopold,’ and was also made a Doctor of Divinity by the University of Glasgow.

“One factor which entered somewhat into the success of this gifted missionary (he himself would admit it), was a loyal helpmeet, and the gift of a bonny boy. This white baby saved the situation for them many times, especially during their long itinerating tours, penetrating the unexplored territory, which were not unattended by danger; and sometimes hostile savages crowded around their missionary boat as it touched the shore and menaced the white strangers. Alas! white men meant to these African savages, too often, slavery and unspeakable cruelties, and these missionaries had to win their confidence by love. On one such occasion, the attitude of the savages was so threatening that Mr. Bentley was almost at his wits’ ends as to how to pacify them. Then there was a God-given inspiration, and he called his wife from her cabin, where she was giving her baby a bath, to the deck. She came, bearing this precious burden, and at the sight of this smiling little one the savages forgot their fears and their animosity. The baby was placed fearlessly in outstretched hands. He smiled and cooed, and these erstwhile savages became strangely calm. When he was returned to his mother, he bore on his little white dress paint marks almost of all colors of the rainbow, for these savages were in war array.

“A few years later, when in England, Mr. Bentley was pursuing his glad task of translating the New Testament. He had come to the verse, ‘Suffer the little children to come unto Me,’ when his

little son toddled into the room, 'Father, let me translate'—not knowing the difference between translating and typewriting. His father picked him up, perched him on his knee, depressed the required keys by means of the little one's finger, and thus the great invitation went forth, first, into that dark land from the Saviour of the children, by the hand of a little child.

"When this child had grown to manhood, and his father long since had gone to his reward, Henry felt the urge to the land of his father's labors. He himself had turned aside from a brief business in his profession of mechanical engineer. He had had two years of Bible training at the Moody Bible Institute, followed by a year with Dr. A. C. Dixon in London, and then a five years' pastorate, but always there was sounding in his ears his call for foreign service. The way was providentially closed. Then came the knowledge of a mission work in Belgium which would have as one of its objectives the training in its Bible School of missionaries for foreign service, and Mr. Bentley responded to their invitation to join the Mission as director of the French Bible School. And thus has God led, so that while unable to go to the Congo himself, because of his health, Mr. Bentley is doing the major part of the training of French-speaking young men and women, native Belgians, who will some day serve their Lord, not only in Belgium, but in her Congo province.

"Mr. Knecht was found by Mr. Van Steenberghe

in one of his reconnoitering expeditions to Holland, where he met this man of God, who later after visiting us at Brussels, accepted the invitation to take charge of the Flemish school.

“Mr. Knegt was born in Holland in 1872, of strict Calvinistic parents, members of the Dutch Reformed Church. He says of himself that he is an illustration of Acts 23:6. As a little child he had longings for the service of God, and when his parents left the Reformed church, because of certain rationalistic tendencies creeping in, and joined an evangelical congregation, where little circles for prayer and Christian fellowship went from house to house, this seed of desire ripened into fruition, and at the age of twenty years he was accepted into membership in that denomination. Thirteen years this young man continued in this communion, but his heart was hungry for something which there he could not find, for this church could not and did not assure him of the certainty of his salvation, which he felt he must have at all costs. Then there came to his attention a group of people,—the Adventists,—who were on fire for God, who preached the speedy return of the Lord, and above all who promised him the certainty of his salvation. Other earnest men were joining their number, so young Knegt also cast in his lot with them. For seven years he first of all imbibed their doctrines, and at last became a leader amongst them; but at the end of seven years, he with several others from their constant study of the Word of God decided that in some

points the position of the Adventists was not Scriptural, and together they definitely disassociated themselves from this body.

“However, to-day Mr. Knegt says he will never forget the things of value which he learned while in that communion. The practise of keeping his Bible in hand, the zealous seeking for souls, and the emphasis upon the Lord’s return. All these things were of incalculable value to him, but God had better things for this young man. He felt afraid to align himself with an organization and decided to keep free from this, but after a year’s doubt and uncertainty his call to Christian work became so clear and strong that God directed his steps to the evangelistic work ‘Jeuel,’ an interdenominational body of Christian people, and in this happy communion he labored for sixteen years. Here he found blessed opportunities for witnessing in markets, and on the streets, and in halls. He only left his own country of Holland, to come across the border into Belgium, when God laid upon his heart the call to minister to the needy Flemish people.”

The basis for the program of the schools is very thorough Bible study, and ample time for personal devotion, and for practical work during the three-term period. The schools meet in the main headquarters of the Mission in Brussels, in quarters that are not too well adapted for the purpose, and yet sufficiently so to furnish a place where the work can be conducted. The schools are conducted during the autumn, winter and spring, on five days in

the week, Monday being the Mission rest day. From nine to ten is the report hour, on Tuesday, concerning the work that has been done between sessions over the week-end. Then from 10:15 to 11:15 is the prayer hour, and this continues until 12:15. On Wednesday, the day begins with an hour of Book study in the Bible; then follows an hour of doctrine, and then an hour on the study of Missions. On Thursday, the day opens with the study of the theory of sermons, making and delivery, followed by an hour on Biblical introductions and the study of prophecy, and this is followed by an hour on Bible divisions with Bible introductions. On Friday, the study of Bible books is again taken up, followed by a study of chapter summaries, and then the morning closes with the study of the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, and the various cults with which the workers must deal as they go about their mission. On Saturday, doctrine, practical work in sermon preparation, and a study of church history occupy the school period.

During the report hour the students tell of the work they have done during the previous week. The school leaders question them on their reports as handed in on the previous Saturday, and they deal with any problems that have perplexed the workers, either in the course of their Christian work, or during their study. Mr. Bentley says that they do not shrink from discussing some of the problems that perplex Christians, and if these problems can be solved they do their best to arrive at a solution,

or at least in cases where the solution is beyond their present capacity, to leave them in a satisfactory state of balance.

All the workers count the prayer hours as among the most important in the week; in fact, they insist that these hours are the most important. During this period, the students begin with a hymn, after which Mr. Norton, if available, reads a brief Scripture passage and delivers a brief message, aided by Mr. Van Steenberghe as interpreter. If Mr. Norton is absent, the messages are delivered either by Pastor Wälti, Mr. Knecht or Mr. Bentley, and there must be double interpretation on these occasions, for during the prayer-hours, the French and the Flemish schools meet together.

Just here it may be noted that not only through the teaching staff, but in another way, good books have a special ministry in the work of the Mission. A recent and most important development has been the translating into the two languages of Belgium some of the more important evangelical literature originally issued in English. It began by the publication of simple tracts and booklets, and these met such a real and pressing need early in the history of the Mission that the translation of larger works was undertaken. Three years' time was required to translate and publish, "What the Bible Teaches," by Dr. R. A. Torrey. The publishing of this large work was made possible through the gifts of Mr. Lyman Stewart, of Los Angeles, and his brother, Mr. Milton Stewart. About the same time was pub-



A GROUP OF THE MISSION WORKERS

First Row—H. A. Bolomey, Gustavine Castiaux, Miss Denecker, Jeanne Baert, Mrs. A. Mietes, Miss Rottier, Mrs. Teeuwissen, Mrs. Edith F. Norton, Mrs. Jean Walti, Mrs. Phillemon Ringoir, Mrs. Jules Neusy, Miss de Pooter, Miss May B. White, Miss Aline d'Amour, Mrs. Fasoel.
 Second Row—Mr. Scarinoci, Mr. Quaedpcerds, Mr. Michiels, Mr. Mattai, Mr. Johann, Mr. Macors, Mr. Knegt, Mr. Mafille, Mr. Vanderbecken, Mr. Jongen, Mrs. John Winston, Pastor Walti, Mr. Bouman, Miss Sahli, Mr. Jules Neusy, Mr. Van Dercq, Mr. Dobbelaere, Mr. Pasche, Mr. Fasoel.
 Third Row—Mr. Meersman, Mr. Servaes, Mr. Rietdyck, Mr. Van Nieuhausen, Mr. Hilberinck, Mr. John Winston, Mr. Walter Teeuwissen, Mr. Visser, Mr. Van Oest, Mr. Wyck, Mr. Hellings, Mr. D'dont, Mr. Outenon, Mr. Kroese, Mr. Cailleaux, Mrs. Philip Howard, Jr., Mr. Philip Howard, jr., Mr. Van Puffelen, Mr. Mietes, Mr. Bentley, Mr. Van Steenberghe, Mr. P. Mietes. Fourth Row—Mr. Pelle, Mr. Daeppen.

lished "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth," by Dr. C. I. Scofield; and Lewis Sperry Chafer's book on "Grace" is now under way in the French language. "Jesus Is Coming," by W. E. Blackstone, has just been issued in the Dutch language, and hundreds of copies have already been ordered from Holland.

In the study of Missions, there has been covered in a general way the character and the conduct of missionaries, with special regard to the difficulties and perplexities to be encountered on the field, and their relations with the natives and with the governments of their field of work.

The Sunday-school training of the workers is not neglected, for during one of the terms that subject has been taken up with the students, based upon a course given by Mr. Hugh Cork in the Moody Bible Institute, especially covering the functions of the Sunday-school as an institution, and the study of the child at different ages, with suggestions as to how to deal with him.

In the study of prophecy, the subject has been divided into three parts, and considered as relating to the Jew, the Gentile, and the Church of God, taking one part each during the three terms of the year, and sub-dividing it again into three parts,—Prophecy of past fulfilment, of present, and of future fulfilment. The study of the Church from the Old Testament point of view was a study of type, and the lives of the women of the Old Testament were not overlooked.

On false doctrines, the students have been enabled to consider the teachings of Christian Science, Spiritism, Seventh Day Adventism, Mormonism, Tongues, etc., and during these studies, the errors in these various cults have been exposed, and suggestions given as to how to deal with any who may have been misled by them. This part of the course includes a study of those teachings of the Roman Catholic Church that are contrary to the Gospel.

Mr. Norton has given courses also on problems and methods of Christian work. He plainly sets forth what is meant by individual soul-winning, and what it involves, and how it is carried on to the best advantage. He has explained to the students how to deal with the uninterested, the anxious, the backsliders, those who have doubts, difficulties, and fears, and in this way has wonderfully helped scores of young people and older ones in the work of the Mission to reach the unconverted far more directly and successfully than they could have done otherwise.

The students for the schools are gathered one by one from the various activities of the Mission, as promising converts develop.

Gustave Vanderbecken, a student in the Flemish Bible School, was a tailor by trade, and had never seen a New Testament until he was twenty-four, and that in England. He desired to become a priest, but fell away into worldliness, and at last was led to Christ. Learning of the Bible Institute, through Jules Michiels, he came there at Mr. Norton's invitation. Since then he has been a diligent student,

preaches at Louvain and Heerent, and carries on a busy colportage work.

Mr. Bentley told me of one student who went through two years' study, and although very teachable, his personal convictions made it a little difficult to get on with him in the beginning, but under the influence of the spirit of the school and his knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ his characteristics have been greatly changed, and he is now one of the leaders in the extensive work of the Mission and is entrusted with work in one of the most difficult fields.

During the term of the school, the students do not have time to support themselves by outside work, but the Mission cares for them on a very moderate support indeed.

Mr. Bentley does not confine his supervision in the school to the technical work by any means. During the period of the tent work at Ath, he took two students on his motor-bicycle, with their guitar and violin, and they visited two market stations in the morning. They sang and played and gave their testimony and gave away and sold Testaments and Bibles. On another market day they went by train, and in the train he took out his violin and the little group sang, accompanied also by a folding organ which they carried. The people in the railway carriage were interested and men were listening, leaning over the partitions between the seats in the third class carriages. Gospels and tracts were distributed.

The report hour in the schools is filled with interesting incidents, and with wise counsel to the students, for they are busy in practical work as much as their time will permit during the school term, and in the summers they are out in the field giving their whole time to colportage and tent work and open-air meetings. Mr. Bentley tells of one student who was traveling in a train and was distributing Gospels, when he was questioned by an old woman who had seemed a little unwilling to take the Gospel. As soon as she saw the nature of the little book, she asked, "You are Protestant, are you?"

"Well, madame, as a matter of fact, that is so."

"Then I will not have any of your books," she replied in a tone of fierce anger, upon which, the other people, one by one, returned their Gospels. The first woman began to sing a hymn in honor of Mary, which continued to the end of her journey. Nevertheless, there was one woman present who said to the worker, "Your Book contains good truth all the same."

"Yes," he replied, "but if you believe that, you must remember that this same word will judge you one day."

The shot went home, and who knows what that journey may produce?

One of the men students was traveling to a town beyond Liège. Three ladies got into the carriage, and after a little he gave each of them a Gospel. Then some men entered at another station, and among them a priest. Some one in the company

whispered, "Will he give the priest one?" The student was equal to the occasion. The priest accepted the Gospel, and without a word put it at the back of the open book of Mass that he was reading. Then followed a conversation with a soldier, the colporteur giving his testimony, whereupon a lady in the carriage joined in giving her testimony as to what Protestantism had meant to her, and for the rest of the journey testimony to the power of the Gospel flowed freely. The student, upon arriving at his home town, went to visit a barber, and was at once asked by an acquaintance to explain certain passages, which led to more conversation. It was continued outside the shop in the form of a large open-air meeting, at which two hundred or three hundred persons were present.

"Who can foresee or prophesy," writes Mr. Norton, "how far-reaching will be the influence that the students of these schools may have in evangelizing Europe and the 'regions beyond'?"

"May not the opinion be confirmed that Dr. Henry W. Frost, the Home Director of the China Inland Mission, gave concerning this work when he said before the Council of the Belgian Gospel Mission in Philadelphia:

"In the first place this is obviously the work of the Holy Ghost. In the second place, it is destined to far larger possibilities than the Nortons ever dreamed. In the third place, it ought to be immediately and largely extended. In the fourth place, as I sometimes think that God may be planning to use

the Koreans to evangelize the Orient, so He may be planning to use Belgium to evangelize the Latin world.'

"This hope is indeed beginning to see fulfillment, particularly since two students of the Bible Institute, Monsieur and Madame Feuilloley, have been accepted by one of the Mission Boards for service in the Belgian Congo, and have sailed for the field.

"The service these schools are rendering is evidenced by the fact that lately we had a call from Indo-China for a French-speaking missionary. The request stated that 'The grammars for this native language are not in English but in French. If your missionaries who know French can come, how much easier will be our work!' There are now five different countries represented amongst the students,—Belgium, France, Holland, Switzerland, and Italy. The Italian brother is recently come from the Waldensians.

"Much pressure has been brought to bear upon the government, and there has been much agitation, especially by writers in 'Le Soir,' one of the foremost daily papers of Brussels, urging the necessity of permitting none but Belgians to go as missionaries to the Congo. While we trust that this will never become an ordinance, yet we are certain that native-speaking missionaries, filled with the Holy Spirit, will have a larger field of usefulness than we foreigners can ever hope for."

"How many know that in this country William Tyndale, the translator of our English Bible, was

strangled and burned, and that his dying cry was, 'Oh God, open the eyes of the king of England!'

"At the top of the hill upon which Brussels is built converge two languages. Four millions of her people to the north speak Flemish (practically the same as Holland Dutch), and beyond them lies Holland with her seven millions of people of the same tongue. Then there are the Dutch possessions, including Dutch Guiana, Sumatra, Java, Borneo, and totalling more than thirty-six millions of people either speaking Dutch or under Dutch influence.

"Beginning at Brussels, there are to the southward four millions of French-speaking Belgians; then Switzerland with her four millions, France with her forty-one and a half millions, the French possessions with their forty and a half millions, so that there are all told one hundred and ninety million people within the scope of the influence of the Mission,—a figure equalling seventy-five millions more than the total population of the United States and American possessions. To these the Mission can make a great spiritual contribution as she draws to her Bible School the young men and women of these two tongues, to go back to their own lands or provinces, there to make known His redeeming love."

Owing to a conflict of engagements, I did not have a full interview with Mr. Knegt, but the two schools are conducted on the same plan, and the facts given here, which I gathered largely through the kindness of Mr. Bentley, would apply with equal

force to the work of each of these growing and highly practical schools, for the training of workers. It was my privilege to see some of the students at work in the field, and in the spirit in which they approached the people, and their effectiveness in presenting the Gospel message, they would compare very favorably with the more mature Bible Institute students in America. One would have to look far to find more enthusiasm and more live and earnest preaching than among these students, so many of whom have come out of superstition and false teaching, into the new light and the new life of the Gospel.

CHAPTER XII

THE HARVEST

In 1918, at the close of the war, it was plain to be seen that the harvesters had been at work in Belgium. Coming up across the border of West Flanders from northern France, where also the harvesters had been busy, you moved in the midst of the evidence of their progress.

They were thorough. The regions around Poperinghe on the far southwestern border of Belgium testified to that. And beyond at Ypres, and along the Menin road the same signs prevailed.

They were stark and sinister signs, by day or by night—shell-torn roads; utterly blasted fields; once-green woodland, now blackened and splintered; brick piles where the solid farmhouses had stood; and the proud city of Ypres gaunt, ravished, and incinerated, with hardly a living soul in its dead highways and byways.

Living souls? Those who among the tragic signs of the harvest were plodding their weary way back into these awesome areas, moved with halting, desperate heaviness, and with faces as devoid of light and hope as the pathetic ruins of their homes, as though the ashes had smothered the soul.

Such were the signs of the harvest that some of us saw at the close of 1918, where the Reaper had been so busily at work.

Today many of the marks of the fearsome ma-

chinery of death are readily seen in that smitten region,—but the land is coming to life. Stand where you will on any lift of the land in the devastated areas, and you will see near and far, gleaming in the sunshine, or lightening the gloom of lowering skies, the light red tiles of new homes, with many a field of living green, or yellow with ripened grain, or dotted with grazing cattle. Ypres is crowded now on market days, everywhere new buildings grace its picturesque streets, and others are rising rapidly under the urgent skill of busy artisans. The Cathedral and the Cloth Hall are still stupendous ruins, grim and gray memorials of death in the heart of the city that is coming to life.

In the area around Ypres there are other evidences of the harvest. On every hand, white with their simple crosses, and glorious with the most beautiful flowers blooming in profusion on the thousands of little mounds, are the vast cemeteries. And over yonder in this field, and that field,—and, yes, in another and another, is a single cross, weather-worn, and not always exactly erect, but with its lovely flowers around it, close to the furrow where the farmer who cares faithfully for that single grave is at work.

Then on a sunny day, if you can find one, slip away from Ypres with its crowds and its noise of hammers, and its honking of trucks, to a low range of hills close to the French border, only a few miles to the south. There is a road whereon you can stand for a full, close view of the slope of Mount



KEMMEL HILL IN 1922

Kemmel, one of the ghastliest shambles of the war. Beside the road is now a wide, green field, rising a little as it becomes the lower slope of the hill. And then, the wheat harvest, gathered up into orderly array in the flooding sunshine! It covers a considerable and pleasant acreage, as the hill rises a little more noticeably. Beyond the slope Mount Kemmel lies couched against the blue of a rarely clear sky—Kemmel, where another harvest once was gathered in the driving wrack of war-clouds that swept its awful slopes. But today, in the Autumn sunshine, the hill Kemmel is as beautiful and as fruitful as the rounded uplands of any untroubled country where war has not wrought its havoc. What a harvest field in Belgium, replete with the fruitage of man's sin, and of God's sunshine!

While Belgium has in recent years loomed before the world against the lurid war horizons as an outstanding national example of rugged courage against enormous odds, even the widely-told story of the Nortons' work in the vigorous and faith-filled Belgian Gospel Mission has not yet sufficiently impressed upon the Western world the present spiritual needs of that country. There a harvest is waiting, whiter unto the reaping than many of us realize.

Mr. Norton will show you today on that hill a few miles from Brussels the spot where he and Mrs. Norton saw the lights of the great city "flaring like a dusky dawn" on the night when with no knowledge of what footing they would find there they

approached what was to become the center of their present labors,—with an abiding faith, a love for souls, and a deep conviction of Belgium's spiritual needs.

They well knew that it was one thing to minister to soldiers in wartime, and quite another to carry the Gospel to the indifferent, the hostile-minded, or the wholly untaught in the Scriptures, during the grim struggles of a pre-occupied people only just emerging from the wreckage of war. The story of God's blessings upon the Mission has been told from many angles. It means nothing less than miracle guidance and sustaining grace that in some twenty-four places scattered over Belgium regular Gospel work is carried on by the Mission. And writing as an eye-witness of very many phases of this work, one is entirely prepared to say that the Nortons, in print and in public address, have given no more than an approach to the picture actually presented by the spiritual devastation among the millions in Belgium.

To say that no other movement in Belgium has at all attempted evangelization in the land would be wholly unfair to the devoted missionary efforts of the few Protestant churches in Belgium. But so many of these churches have yielded to the infiltration of Modernism that their testimony to the Gospel is greatly confused, to say the least. And there is no more room in Belgium than in any other part of this needy world, for dispensaries of adulterated spiritual food to the hungry. The churches that

have remained true in that land have an exceedingly important ministry, but they do not begin to cover the field, nor can they be expected to. It is into such conditions that the Belgian Gospel Mission carries the seed of eternal life-giving fruitage.

Among the means by which this evangelization should be carried on is the establishing of permanent centers at strategic points in buildings larger or smaller that should be owned by the Mission.

The importance of such stations both for the propagation of the Gospel, and for the conservation of results is illustrated by the hall of the Assembly, or church, of the Mission in Brussels,—a rented building at 31 Boulevard Bisschoffsheim, with Pastor Jean Wälti in charge. The pastor was converted as a boy in his native city of Geneva, Switzerland, in 1892. From that time forward he has been colporteur, evangelist, pastor, temperance worker, in Switzerland or in France, and now in Belgium, where his pastoral leadership in the Assembly of the Mission includes the many spiritual activities of a soul-winning ministry.

Ten buildings already belong to the Mission, but there are twenty-four preaching stations and centers of colportage work. Rental is almost impossible, and always uncertain of tenure. As this book goes to press the Mission is earnestly calling attention to the need for a house for the Headquarters in Brussels that should furnish suitable rooms for offices; adequate space for the two Bible Institutes with class and lecture rooms, and dormitory ar-

rangements for the students who now have to find whatever they can by way of lodgings in any part of the city. It must be borne in mind that housing conditions in Brussels are quite as difficult as in any American city, and indeed more so, because of the post-war conditions. The central building so greatly needed would also provide space for caring for missionaries and others in Christian service passing through Brussels, for often missionaries remain in that city for months, to study one of the languages, or to take special studies in tropical medicines before departing for the Congo.

In another city, the great industrial city of Liège, meetings have been held in a rented building, but even that is now completely outgrown.

In another industrial region of Belgium—the town of Charleroi—a city of some 90,000 people, is calling for a permanent meeting place, and in that very city the Belgian Gospel Mission held a series of evangelistic meetings three and a half years ago, in a single meeting of which there were some fifteen hundred present; and two years later another evangelist held meetings in this same city in a smaller hall, which had as many as eleven hundred at a single service. In these meetings scores of people indicated their desire to accept Christ as their Saviour, and yet almost four years have passed by, and though the Mission is repeatedly advertising in the local papers, and have sent their representative there to rent a building, they have not been able to secure one. Singularly enough the town Council

in this city gave the Bourse free of charge, which shows the interest that the men in civic positions had in this first campaign.

Some eleven percent. of the buildings in Belgium were destroyed or rendered uninhabitable by the war, and when it is realized that this is the most densely populated country of Europe, these conditions justify one in saying that it is probably, therefore, the most congested country in the world with respect to housing.

Again, pleas have come from Dixmude and Nieuport—cities utterly destroyed during the war, but now rebuilt and crowded once more. From still another part of the country through a worker at Court St. Etienne comes the call: "One hundred and fifty persons in our meeting here. Could we purchase a hall?"

Bases of operations are needed at many strategic points, and meanwhile the enlarging colportage and public evangelism of the Mission goes forward. Just now in the spring of 1924, Pastor A. Antomarchi, a noted French evangelist, who was born on the island of Corsica, and whose granduncle was Napoleon's physician, is coming to join the staff of the Mission especially for a still wider evangelism.

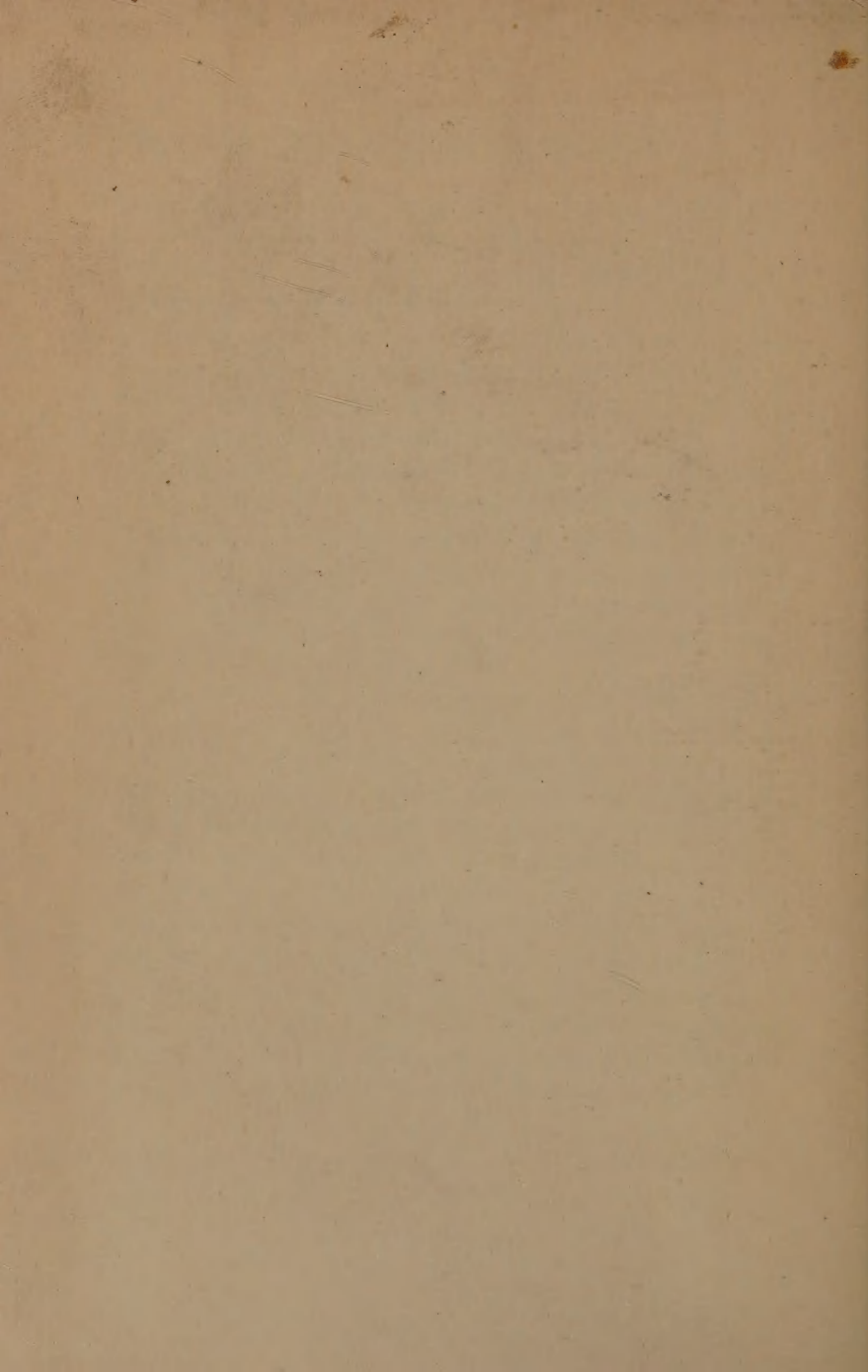
In one of the meetings in the Mission headquarters in Brussels, Mr. Georges Collinet, after a visit to a number of the stations, reported his observations. He recounted the hearty response of the people as the need was presented to them. Individual gifts of one thousand francs came both from

Liège and Antwerp. One gift of this amount came from a convert who was dying of cancer. Mr. Collinet mentioned also one of the Mission staff, a colporteur, a man converted during the war, who had lived an evil life, and now he and his wife were giving twelve hundred francs toward the building fund,—which represented all they had been able to save during their married life.

In the same gathering Mr. Bolomey, the pastor in Liège, told of two old people living in a mere shanty at the end of a blind alley, who brought to their pastor a potted plant, and a gift of ten francs for the Sunday-school, and two hundred and forty francs,—all they had left in the world,—as a contribution to the building fund!

One must visit the country itself to fully realize the absolute need of buildings of some kind in which, and from which, to reach cities and towns and surrounding villages. They are the bases from which the messengers go out, and to which the spiritually needy come with eager hopefulness. They are the recruiting stations for converts and for future workers, and they are the centers from which the harvesters go out into the fields that await them.

The harvest of spiritual devastation has too long been sown and reaped in brave and responsive Belgium. A very different harvest awaits reaping and garnering today in that fair land.



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